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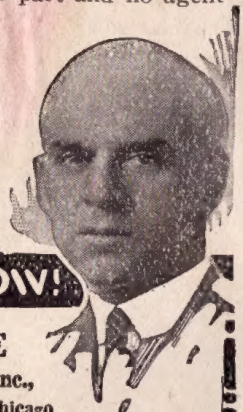

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EVERY WEEK

Vol. LVIII FEBRUARY 20, 1926 No. 5

Bluejay

By Max Brand

Author of "Sandy Sweyn Comes Out of the Wilds," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A FIGHTING FOOL.

NOBODY has to tell me—because I know. If I had stayed on the range, I would have been all right—mixing around in my own crowd of folks, who would of understood that I was just extra happy and letting off steam. A gang of city people got no sense of humor. Neither do they care none about what other folks would be thinking. The only street that they've any interest in is the one that they live on. The only house of that street that amounts to anything is the number where they stay. I mean the usual city folks. Not you!

I don't want to get mixed up; I want to tell this straight. It began when I hit the pay dirt on the back of old Champion Mountain. I thought it would be one of those pinch veins; it started too good. But it *didn't* pinch. It strung out and got wider. I ground up a terrible lot of dust with my little

coffee mill, and before that vein disappeared I had the haul of my life.

My haul was just too big. The idea of staying on the range or in a range town wouldn't fit up with a load of hard cash like that. I needed a lot fancier corral to show my stuff. I started for the city.

I didn't have no idea of spending everything that I had, of course. I figgered that my wad was so thick that I could paw at it for six months and never more than raise the surface. After that, I would go back to the range, where my own country is, and grab me a ranch and a gang of cows and start in regular to be a real man. Prospecting was never more than a side show to me.

When I got to town I got myself fixed up with some clothes. They wasn't quiet, either. They was calculated to match up with the way that I was feeling inside, which was just gay, you understand? I didn't miss no tricks. Gloves and such went in with the lot, and I had a vest that fair palpitated good cheer. I got me a cane, too —which they call them sticks when they speak polite. I even got down to spats, though I never got used to wearing cloth on my feet.

Where I appeared I was a noise that made folks look around. I begun to have a real gay time. I set myself up at a hotel where you could spend five bucks for a meal without no particular pain, and where the elevator boy looked like the son of a college president. After a while I collected some friends, too, and they showed me how really to part yourself from coin.

So I woke up one morning and pulled out my wad, and I was pretty near beat to see that it had melted down to three hundred-dollar bills. That wasn't enough to make a dent on the range. So I decided that it might as well go chasing after the rest of the gold dust. I rung up a couple of the boys, and we started on a party. I was feeling a mite reckless, but I figgered out that I wouldn't really want to hurt nobody's feelings, so I left my Colt behind in the bureau drawer.

We skidded around the town for a while, and about midnight we found ourselves in a gambling joint. I seen my last twenty go across the green felt, just as the same time that the dealer done a funny pass. I reached out and grabbed his hand—and down from his sleeve there come—oh, nothing much—just a couple of aces. You understand?

I was not really peeved. I had aimed to spend the last of my coin that night, and it didn't much matter how it went. But making this discovery of mine give me a chance to make that party *real*. Peeling off my coat, I stood up on the table and told the folks in general what I thought of them and their ways. The boss of the joint sicked a couple of bouncers on me, and I dived off the table at them to make a beginning.

They didn't make a beginning; they just flattened out on the floor, and I had to walk over them to get at the crowd.

If I had had the old Colt with me, there wouldn't have been any trouble. There rarely is with guns. Revolvers is not deadly weapons. They're just noise makers. Some folks fires off crackers on the Fourth; on the range they're more partial to Colts.

You get heated up, and you pull your Colt, and you blaze away. You don't hit nothing, because revolvers ain't meant for hitting targets except by accident. You just bust a couple of mirrors and windows, plow up the floor, and rake the ceiling. Everybody whoops and dances around and limbers up, and a good time is had by all, with nothing in the way of damage done that a carpenter can't fix in half a day's work. But all I had was my hands.

I'm not small. Working a single jack and grinding pay dirt hadn't made me no smaller. When I stepped into that crowd and laid my hands on a couple of the boys, I could feel them give under my grip like their bones was made of India rubber. More than that, they got scared, and they begun to yell:

"He's gone mad! Get the police!"

It was disgusting to hear the way that they carried on because I was taking a mite of exercise. One of them got so excited that he hit me over the head with a chair. After that I let that crowd have both fists.

I waded through them across the room. Then I turned around and made a furrow back the long way of the place. When I come to the door, there was a couple of cops. What difference was cops to me? I bumped their heads together, took a breath of fresh air from the outside, and went back to finish scrambling up the eggs inside.

I'd hardly got started when one of the coppers crawled to his feet and pulled a gun. I had to take it away from him. Then his buddy got funny with his night stick and busted it over my head, and I had to take him up and throw him through the window, with the glass and the frame carried along in front of him.

The lights went out, and right after that I skidded on something and went down on the back of my head. When I come to, I was riding on a wagon with a couple of boys in blue coats and brass buttons sitting on my chest. I said to them would they please mind shifting off of my chest. And one of them said:

"He's waking up. I told you that he would!"

"Sure," said another; "you can't kill a Swede by hitting him over the head. He ain't vulnerable there."

I said: "Gentlemen, did you sort of refer to me by speakin' of a Swede?"

They allowed that they did, and I got real irritated.

The size of that patrol wagon cramped my style a good deal, but I managed to have a pretty good time, taking all things together. The five coppers was pretty groggy when we got to the station house. Then about a dozen fresh hands turned out and grabbed me.

"Use gun butts on him," said the sergeant from where he was lying on the floor holding his side with both arms. "Clubs ain't nothing but matchwood to him!"

That was a mighty practical police force. They took his word for it and they tried out my head with gun butts.

I come to in a cell, all wrapped up in bandages. My clothes was tore up, too, which hurt me more than the feeling of my head—a whole lot! That outfit was something that the boys up there on the range would pretty near have paid admission, for the sake of having a look at it!

The next morning I had to see the judge. He looked me over and wanted to know if I had resisted arrest. The sergeant said that here was fifteen members of the force that would testify that I had, and five more that he wanted particular to bring into the courtroom, but the doctor said that they was not fit to be allowed out of bed right then.

"And how about the prisoner?" asked the judge. "He looks as though he had been sent down a flume!"

I said that I was all right, and that I was sorry that I had messed up any of the boys.

"Are you a professional wrestler?" asked the judge.

"With doggies and drills."

The judge give me a grin. "You are just down from the range?"

"My first and last appearance here, you bet," said I.

"All right," said the judge. "By the

looks of my police force, it had *better* be your last appearance. Thirty days!"

"Thirty days?" sang out the police force, when they got me outside the room. "Thirty years would be more like it! I never heard an old sap like that judge. He had ought to be in the asylum for crippled brains!"

Thirty days didn't seem like very much, between you and me. I thought that a month in jail would be nothing, but by the time that the first week was over, and the swelling on my head had sunk down pretty near to the bed rock of my skull, my patience was all used up. Besides, the fare was pretty poor in that jail. It's hard to keep two hundred and twenty pounds of bone and meat working on the sort of a diet that they handed me.

Well, the night of the eighth day I tried the bars, and I found a place where the stuff gave a little when I pulled. Pretty soon I had worked a bar out of its socket.

My hands was raw before I got through working that bar loose, but after that I had a sort of can opener to use on the rest of the prison. I never seen a lever that was handier for the forcing of doors than that bar was. It just worked fine, and I simply tore myself out of that jail as easy as anything that you would want.

When I got to the street I remembered that my clothes wasn't too good. I went back, tied up one of the guards, put on his suit, and borrowed a hat from a peg on the wall of the office. I also took a handful of smokes off of the desk of the warden's room, and started out again.

After eleven blocks, what should bump into me as I turned a corner but the night patrol! There was no reason why they should have suspected me —I was walking along brisk and sober. But they asked me what I was doing at that hour of the night. When I started to tell them that I was a milk-wagon driver, and that I was reporting for the morning beat, one of the coppers recognized my voice. That patrol spilled all over me, yelling:

"The Swede!"

My hands was sore from my work eight nights before, but I did pretty well until some one sank a .45 slug through my left thigh.

They took me back and got me ready for the judge. It was pretty tough. The first time was just riot and resisting arrest, but this time it was breaking jail, assault on a guard, burglary, and resisting arrest all over again.

The judge said: "One year!"

Why should I string this story out? I tried to bust loose again, and the result was that I wound up in Fulsom for two years!

I don't know how it is now, but in those days Fulsom was a nest of pretty hard birds. I was no softy when I went into that penitentiary, but I was a hard-boiled, tool-proof bad one before I had been in there six months. The work was just hard enough to keep me fit, and my appetite good enough to enjoy the prison grub. I got meaner and harder all of the time.

After I had served out a year of my sentence, I was headed for being a *real* bad one. Then I bumped into the chaplain. He went by the name of Maxim, and he was a rare, good old boy with a white head and a cool blue eye. We hit it off first class. We used to have boxing shows at the prison games, once a month. That chaplain used to umpire the bouts. The first time that I showed, when I was whaling the ribs out of a big two-hundred-and-fifty-pound Finn, the chaplain said:

"Kitchin, you're not getting paid for this!"

That struck me funny, and I got to laughing so that I couldn't do the Finn no real harm after that, aside from busting his nose in the last round.

The chaplain and me become friends.

He got to talking to me regular, and pretty soon he got me a soft job as a trusty, working in his office. It panned out pretty good, too. When he called in a bad actor, it sort of helped the thug to take religion serious, seeing me in the background. Because I wasn't never a pretty man, and having my head clipped didn't improve me none; it made my ears stick out most amazing.

The chaplain got me to reading books, too, and he educated me pretty thorough all around. Which is why I can write so good about everything that I done and seen.

When I left that prison I was pretty near sorry to go. First of all, I had planned to go in with a couple of yeggs and work the small towns in the back country with them, but the chaplain, he talked me out of it altogether. He said that the range was the place for me. So back to the range I went.

I was none too proud; jailbirds is not popular on the range—and I was known pretty well by my riding and my being so big. Well, I looked over the map and picked out a corner of the mountains where I had never been before. I picked out the town specially because it had such a funny name—Sour City. Three days later, I crawled out from the rods, stretched myself, and looked over my new country.

It was a pretty good little town. It was set down in the corner between where Sour Creek runs into the Big Muddy. It was as neat a little town as you'd ever like to see, with some paving, street lamps, good shops, one brick hotel and two that wasn't brick, and pretty nearly everything that anybody could want to have in a town. Over the hills that rolled up all around there was a fine big sweep of cattle country. Behind that, the mountains went sashaying up to the sky, with black pines most of the way and a white-headed summit here and there.

Altogether, it looked good to me. I stopped in at a blacksmith shop to see for a job, but they was full-handed. Anyway, they couldn't see past my peeled head; so I went out on the street—and the first person that I bumped into was the sergeant.

I mean, the police sergeant that I had laid out in the patrol wagon down in the city!

CHAPTER II.

FRIEND OR ENEMY?

AIMING the way that I was, toward starting at the bottom and working my way up, with a new name the same as the chaplain had planned for me to take, I wasn't any too tickled to see the face of that sergeant. But I was plumb happy compared with him.

He give me a wall-eyed look, and then he side-stepped right out into the gutter. I started to pass on; then I changed my mind and turned around, going back to where he was still standing and looking back at me. He acted like he expected me to hit him.

"I'm armed, Kitchin!" he cried. "Don't try nothing! I'm armed, and I won't take nothing from you!"

"Sergeant," said I, "you got me wrong!"

He put up his hand, quick. "I'm not a sergeant any more," said he. "I'm doing some ranching up here, 'Blondy,' and it doesn't help any to bring up the past!"

I hadn't liked him when I met him there in the city, because he took it to heart so mean, the way that I laid him out in the patrol wagon. Now I could see that he was even worse than I had thought.

You take them by and large, the cops are a pretty good lot. A policeman is a fellow that is willing to risk his life for his job, and mostly men that do that sort of work have got to have something that is worth while in them.

Take most of those boys down there in the city. They didn't hold no grudge

against me because I had spoiled a few of their faces for a while. One fellow that had a nose out of place used to make a point of coming around to see me, and he used to chat with me real cheerful. He would tell me how he was taking boxing lessons. He hoped that when I got out of jail I would drop around to see him; then he would peel off his uniform, and we would have it out. He would try to do for my nose what I had already done for his. I intended to give him the chance, too. If things ever get laid out so that I can take some time off and get back to that town, I'm sure going to call on him and give him his chance at me.

Well, most coppers are that way—clean, hard hitters—but now and then you'll come across an exception to the rule. That sergeant had got a busted rib where I hit him, in the police patrol. Not really clean busted, but only fractured—nothing hardly worth speaking about at all, between men. But he laid on about it a lot; he had told me that when I got out of that jail, I would be extremely lucky if he didn't have me in again so fast that my head would swim!

All of these things come piling back through my head when I met him up there in Sour City. I seen where he hated to have it known that he had ever been a sergeant, because he felt that he had raised himself a whole long ways above those old days. That made me dislike him a lot more than I ever had before. About the lowest thing that a man can do is to try to cut himself loose from what he used to be in his past. I said:

"Randal, if you want me to forget that you used to be a police sergeant and——"

"That's exactly what I want you to do!" He was pretty eager about it, too. "However," he went right on, "I don't suppose that you're going to be staying around Sour City very long?"

The minute that I seen him, I had decided that I would be moving on as soon as the next freight pulled out from the station; but the way he talked, it made me think that I had better stay on right where I was. It looked like a chance was opening up, and I decided to talk straight to him. The chaplain had pretty well persuaded me that you don't gain anything by talking around the corners about folks.

I said: "Randal, it ain't hard to see that you want to get rid of me from here?"

"Not at all!" he exclaimed, and he waved his hand, but I could see a fairly sick look on his face.

I said: "Now, Randal, you've gone and worked yourself up to where you're a rancher that can afford to wear real solid-silver spurs, as I see, and handmade boots and all the rest. You ain't fond of the idea of having the folks around here ever know that you used to wear a night stick quite a bit."

"You may put it that way," said he; "I really welcome frank talk!"

"Yes, you do!" I exclaimed. "But you're gunna get it! I don't like you, Randal, and I never did. You was low and mean and ornery, and there ain't hardly anything in the world that would do me so much good as to sink a hand in your ribs again!"

He gave a little grunt and a step back, at that.

"But," I continued, "I know what I can do, and what I can't. What I can't do is to make any more trouble. I've had my dose. I've been licked good and proper, and I ain't gunna forget it. *Nothing* is ever gunna give the law a chance to send me back to Fulsom again. Now, Randal. I'm up here, not on a bat, the way that you seen me down in the town, but mighty quiet and sober. I'm a hard-working

man, and I want to get a job, and I want to stick to it. You understand?

"Now, the folks around here ain't any too fond of employing jailbirds, and you know it. The easiest thing in the world would be to get me out of this section of the country by just letting the word get out that I've been serving a prison sentence. But the minute that I hear any talk like that, I'm gunna know who started it, and I'm gunna come for you. When I get to you, I'm gunna forget all about prison. If they get me and send me back on account of you and that sort of talk—it'll be murder, Randal. And I mean it!"

I did mean it, too. When I thought of losing a chance to go straight on account of a rat like this here Randal, it sickened me. I would like to of wrung his neck right then and there. But Randal understood me. He was pretty gray as he stared at me. Then he begun to nod.

He had a long, thin face with deep-set eyes, and now an idea begun to work up in those eyes. All at once, he fetched a hand into a vest pocket, brought out a wallet, and sifted a few bills out. He held them out to me.

"Here's seventy-five dollars," said he.

"And that's my price for beating it and keeping my mouth shut?" I asked. "You can go to the devil first, Randal. Your money is dirt to me!"

That was pretty free and independent talking. In more than one part of the range that I could name, it would of got a man shot, right there and on the spot. It looked like this was not one of them parts of the range. Randal just smiled back at me, saying:

"Now, don't you be a fool, Blondy. The thing for you to do, kid, is to step into that store up the street and get yourself a suit of clothes. They've got a big assortment, and maybe they'll have a suit that'll fit you. They carry hats and shoes, too, and shirts and neckties. You haven't got enough money there to buy the world, but you got enough to fit yourself out decently. Well, Blondy, that's what I want you to do, and after you get yourself made up, you come over to the hotel, and you'll find me waiting for you in the lobby. It'll be lunch time then, and you and me will go in and surround some chops or whatever looks good to you in the eating line. You do what I tell you, and don't you ask any questions until it's all over."

I shouldn't have taken that money, of course. Looking back on it, I can see that I was a fool and sort of a crook to take it. But I'll give you my word that it wasn't the idea of getting something for nothing that appealed to me so much. What flabbergasted me, really, was the mystery that was behind all of this.

The ex-sergeant of police wasn't any extravagant, generous sort of a fellow. I aim to believe that you can mostly spot a generous man by a sort of a stupid, wall-eyed look that he has. You try your hand at it. Just look over the men that you know and you'll see what I mean quick enough, because the tight-fisted fellows are apt to have a pretty wide-awake look—as if they were trying to make out whether you were worth noticing or not. The generous folks have a sort of a stupid look. When you ask them for something, they get a sort of sick expression.

There wasn't anything stupid about this here fellow Randal. He was as sharp as a rat. There was something up his sleeve; he wanted to get something out of it, and I naturally wondered what it could be. It was a case of my wits against his wits, and I was willing to bet that my brains were as hard as my fist, so far as he was concerned. I decided that I would do what he said.

I went up the street to a store, and I

found a pretty good-looking brown suit, which I got right into. There was a hard job finding shoes that would fit, but I managed it after a pretty tight squeeze. I sashayed out of that place with a new hat on the side of my head, looking like a million dollars, you bet.

The ex-sergeant was waiting in the lobby of the hotel; he give me one squint up and down and nodded. "You take to it easy," said he. "You got a knack for spending, I see."

He led me into the dining room, and we settled down to see how much food could be got onto one table. After that, we seen just how quick that table could be emptied again. Pretty soon he come around to cigar time and set back and clamped his teeth in a nice-looking black cigar. I stuck to cigarettes that I rolled myself, because I wanted to keep my head clear.

CHAPTER III.

"IF THIS GAME WORKS——"

HE said: "Now, big boy, you figure that this is all pretty queer, and, after I've handed out enough money to dress you up, you wonder what I'm going to try to get out of you. Ain't that right?"

"I dunno," I answered, "but maybe it's just because you're a naturally generous chap, and you're willing to let bygones be bygones."

You see, I wanted to bluff him out and make him think that I was about ten shades simpler than the fact. He just leaned a bit over the table, puffed out a cloud of smoke, and grinned at me through it.

"You lie like the devil!" said he.

I couldn't help grinning back. "Maybe you and me are gunna be able to understand each other," said I.

"I guess we are," he answered; "I *hope* we are. But the first thing for you to write down in red is that I haven't forgot a thing. I still wear a strip of tape on my side where you busted me in the ribs, and after I take that tape off I'll still remember. I'm not a friend of yours, big boy, and don't you forget it."

"Randal," said I, "for a crook, you talk like an honest man; you sort of warm up my heart. Now start going and spill the beans. You want my scalp, and you've bought me a new outfit. When do you pull the knife?"

He grinned again. He seemed to like this aboveboard talk as much as I did. Then he said: "I don't know when the scalping will take place. You're a pretty hard one, Kitchin, and I don't know just how I'll be able to go about cracking you. In the meantime, I have to forget about what I want to do to you. I have to think just about what you can do for me."

"Go on. This sounds all better and better, I got to admit. When does the music and the dancing begin?"

"Poison is bad stuff," said he, "but when you want to get rid of the ground squirrels it has its uses. You're the poison that I want to use now. You hear me talk?"

"I hear you talk. You got a poison job, and I'm to be the goat. Go ahead!"

"That's exactly it. I've got a bad job on my hands, and I need somebody like you. But first I have to put the cards on the table—not that I want to, but that I have to in order to get you interested."

I nodded. It looked pretty clear that he was talking honest—not because he liked honesty, but because he saw that it was the only policy that would work in this case.

He went on to say that he had come out of a family where everybody was pretty well fixed. When he was a youngster, just out of college, his dad had set him up in business and given him a flying start, but his ways weren't

saving ways. He liked the things that money give you, but he didn't cotton to the ways that money is made. So, pretty soon, he went bust.

Right about then his father went on the rocks, too, and it busted the old man's heart. He died, and there was nothing in the estate for young Randal. He looked around and got him a job on the side, in the police force of the big town, without letting any of his family know what he was doing. Maybe it was like taking a thief to catch a thief. Anyway, he done pretty good as a policeman and worked up to a job as a sergeant, when he got word that his dad's brother, Stephen Randal, had died. Lacking any other heirs that he was fond of, he had split his cash between Harry Randal's brother and sister. What he left to Harry, the sergeant, was his ranch.

It was a going ranch and very prosperous. When Harry had a look at it, he felt that everything was pretty fine for him. Then, about a month after he took possession, over came his grandfather, Henry Randal. The ex-sergeant said:

"This old goat, my grandfather, is one of those foxes that lose their strength when they get old, but that don't lose their wits, y'understand? He has about three millions in land and money, and when he visited me he opened up and showed me his bank account, the statement of the stocks, and the loans that he had outstanding. It was a list as long as your arm, I tell you! He said to me:

" 'Harry, I think that you're a bright boy, but I don't know about your working qualities. This ranch of your uncle's was always a hard proposition to make pay. Your uncle did well here because your uncle was a man who worked about twenty hours out of every day. One reason that this ranch is hard to make pay is that, though the grass is good here and there is plenty of water for the cows, the ranch backs up on a regular hole-in-the-wall country, and it's pretty hard to keep the rustlers from edging in and getting away with the cream of the calf crop every year. Your Uncle Stephen managed to scare the rustlers off because he was a hard-boiled fellow, as maybe you know. They feared him morning, night, and noon, and don't you forget it! But, Harry, I don't know that you're going to do so well. You are bright, but I don't see you working twenty hours out of every twenty-four. You are brave enough, but I don't know that you'll make the rustlers lose any sleep. You see, I understand what troubles you have ahead of you.

" 'Now, Harry, I've showed you a property worth three millions. I can go another step and tell you something else, and that is that I don't like your brother. He's gone in for a banking job in a city. I hate the cities and the people that stay in them. Your sister has married a fathead who doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain. Neither of them are going to get a penny of my money. That leaves you, Harry, as the sole natural heir—so far as I'm concerned! But, mind you, I have a lot of doubts about you, and the way that you can clear those doubts up is to take hold on this ranch and make a paying proposition out of it. Every quarter I'm going to send out an expert accountant that I can trust to go over your books. If those books don't show an increase on the right side, you'll hear from me to the effect that you needn't worry about your inheritance any more.

" 'Harry, if you can take hold of that ranch and work it satisfactory to me—and well enough to make a real profit out of it—you are going to get every penny of my money. You understand? I have a heart that is due to stop working in about a year or two. I haven't any illusions about my future, at all.

I'll die within about twelve months or two years, at the outside. I want to leave my fortune in one lump to a man who can take good care of it. Think it all over, my boy, and when you've finished your thinking, start in and work like the devil. You have to have patience, courage, and brains, and strength to win out. What your other moral qualities may be I don't know, and I don't care; I'm not any saint, myself. If you can make this ranch pay. you're as good a man as your Uncle Stephen was, and he was my favorite son.'

"Right there he finished. He wouldn't stay to dinner. He got onto his horse, in spite of his eighty years and his bad heart, and he rode twenty-five miles back to his own ranch.

"You know me. You think I'm a crook. Maybe I am. I know you. I know you're a crook, too, and there hasn't been time for you to let your hair grow since you got out of the pen. Besides that, you hate me. And I hate you, because you broke a rib for me and fractured a good deal of my self-respect. Very well. Let's look at the other side of the picture.

"You're broke. You need a job. You know the cattle country and the cattle business. On the other hand, I am in a bad fix. I have a big ranch, and I've loaded up my staff of cow-punchers with regular two-gun bad men —hard-boiled eggs with reputations that need a shorthand reporter, working a week, to write them up. I got those hard fellows because I wanted to run out the rustlers in the back country. You see? Now that I've got them in, I've found out that they work hand in glove with the rustlers themselves. At least, that's my suspicion. I dread the next round-up. because I know that it's going to show me short hundreds of cows. That will be where my pretty dream busts all to pieces and the three millions go up in smoke.

"I got my place full of these hard-boiled fellows, but now that I have them I can't run them. If I fire them, they'll simply go over to the rustlers, and I'll be in worse than ever. Fire one, and they'll all quit, because they're as thick as thieves. I can't show my face in the bunk house without getting laughed at, now. I've hired three ranch managers in the last three weeks, and not one of them has lasted twenty-four hours with that crew of yeggs.

"Very well. What I want is a two-fisted, two-gun fighting fool who will beat that crowd into order and make them like it! I'm willing to take a long chance and try you out. I'm desperate. That ugly mug of yours looks good to me, right now. What do you say, young feller? What do you say to taking on the job, Kitchin?"

I rolled this idea under my tongue. It sounded good, and it sounded bad. I had my two hands, and they were pretty strong hands. What with the life I had led the last two years, of hard labor in the prison and boxing every month, I was as hard as nails. There was two hundred and twenty pounds of me to be hard. I didn't worry about what would happen if it came to a hand-to-hand rough-and-tumble mix-up—but where would I be if the guns were pulled? I was never any hand at guns, as you may have gathered from what I've said about revolvers before. If some handy two-gun dick was to bob up in a nasty humor, where would I be? Nowhere, of course! However, there is nothing like a hard job to make you rise out of yourself. This looked to me like a lost cause, and there was enough Irish in me to make me like lost causes.

What I couldn't really do, I might be able to bluff through. I said to Randall: "Well, where do I get off? I get a year or so of bullet eating and fighting and excitement. And after that?"

"I'm glad to see that you're a practical man with an eye on the future, old son," said this Randal. "I'm *mighty* glad to see it. It proves to me more than ever that you and me *will* get on. And now, what do you say your reward ought to be?"

I thought it over. There ain't anything like hitching your wagon to a star. And I answered:

"It looks to me like your main job is being a grandson. And my main job is everything else. Well, Randal, I suppose that the best that I can ask from a hard customer like you is a fifty-fifty split."

Randal grinned. "You get half of the three million, and I get the other half?" he asked, very soft.

"That's about it," said I.

He shook his head. "Guess again. No, I'll make you a proposition, and a big one. That ranch I'm on is a good thing—for the right man. Uncle Stephen cleared fifty thousand a year for the last ten years that he was on it. Now, old-timer, what I say is—if you can make the ranch pay for me, you can make it pay for yourself. If this game works, I take the three millions, of course, and you get the ranch. You can't budge me a cent higher than that!"

I knew he meant what he said. I leaned back in the chair and sighed. "All right," said I. "Put that in writing. And—I'm ready for a cigar, now!"

CHAPTER IV.

A BOY AND A KNIFE.

HE didn't like the idea of putting a contract like that in writing. As he pointed out, I could use that contract to blackmail him, in case I threw up the overseer job on the ranch. Then I showed him that, in case I couldn't make a go of the thing, I wouldn't be able to get much out of him. The only opinion that he had to be afraid of was his uncle's, and the only person that could let him win his uncle's respect—and money—was me.

Randal thought it all over very slowly, his eyes fixed on a far corner of the room, not a shadow of a frown on his face. I could tell that he was a deep one by that. Your simple chap will wrinkle his face into a knot when he's working out a problem, but your real deep one never bats an eye. Finally he looked me in the eye.

"Old-timer," he said, "I think that you're about as downright bad a case as—I am!"

"You flatter me," I said. "But does the thing go through?"

"It goes through as slick as a whistle," he said. "I'm putting all my dice in this one box, and I can't keep any up my sleeve. So here goes!"

He pulled an old envelope out of his pocket, and he tore it open. On the two sides of it, in a fine, clerical hand he wrote out that contract, signed it, and passed it over to me.

Of course, he hadn't missed a chance to put in some "ifs" and "buts" that changed the whole meaning, but I had him cross them out until the contract made slick reading for me. Then we made a copy of it and took it to a notary public to sign.

After I had put my agreement in my wallet, Randal said that we had to get ready to go out to the ranch. The reason that he had bought me the new suit was partly because he wanted to open my mind and get me prepared for something big to come, and partly because I would have to make a pretty good impression on the boys at the ranch. If I walked in on them dressed like a tramp, they wouldn't respect me none.

There was good sense in that, of course. They say that clothes don't make the man, but I've noticed that from your best girl up to the gent that you touch for a loan, the clothes you

wear make the difference between getting inside the door and being left out in the cold.

The idea of Randal was that I should lay hold of a suit case, buy some stuff to put in it, and then drive out with him in the buckboard. I agreed that that was a pretty good idea. He had some business to attend to, and so I said that I would go out and do the buying, and I asked him what money he wanted to let me have.

He fair staggered me, at that. He pulled out a wad of money and told me to go as far as that would take me. When I counted the wad, there was five hundred in it! I could see that Randal didn't figure me for any piker that would be apt to take my money and my clothes and board the first train out of the town. He expected that I would try for the big game. I decided that I would show him that he wasn't wrong in trusting me to play for the main graft.

I went down to the Mexican quarter of Sour City—on the northern side of the creek. I wanted to try the Mexicans for the stuff that I needed, because I knew that in that part of the town I was more apt to find stuff such as I wanted. Also, what happens among greasers doesn't float back to the whites. It's dead and buried right where it happened, and I didn't want to have any curious eyes watching me and reporting me so's the boys out on the ranch might hear about it.

The white side of Sour City was as slick as you please, all dressed up with shiny pavements and such. Across the creek there was a difference! Twelve inches of dust lay in the streets, with the wind stirring up drifts and pools in it all the time. When a horse galloped in that part of the town, he left a regular fog behind him, as high as the tops of the houses. Everything was dirty and broken-down and lazy and comfortable. In the doorways you would see the old señoras sitting, patting out their supply of tortillas for that evening. Here and there a couple of pigs would be squealing at each other while they tried to root at the same spot in the dirt. There was kids around that wasn't bothered much with clothes—mostly a shirt or a pair of trousers, but not the two together at the same time. Everybody looked happy and sort of in tune with things.

I seen a great big store where there was new stuff and secondhand—everything that a body could want or even think of. All along the front of the veranda, on pegs and nails, there was old saddles, bridles, quirts, spurs, chaps, and stirrup leathers, stirrups, saddle flaps, saddlebags, and packsaddles, black whips, black snakes, and four-horse lashes, with bits in a thousand fancy Mexican styles for the torturing of a good horse, and all the spurs different, too. That was the sort of a store that a kid could stand in front of and wish for a whole year together—and make a new wish every ten seconds!

There was a kid there, too. He was a slim-built brat, about thirteen or fourteen. His voice hadn't changed yet. It was high and thin, but it hadn't begun to crack yet. It was more like a woman's. He was pretty ragged, but, anyway, he had enough clothes of one sort or another to cover him down to the calves of the legs. He had a battered old felt hat jammed down on a head that was covered with an extra-thick thatching of black hair.

He held out his hand before me and ask me, with his head onto one side and his voice whining, to please help a poor orphan what had no father nor no mamma so he could get a little to buy a loaf of bread, which he would eat with cold water and bless me.

"Ain't you got a cent on you, kid?" I asked.

"Ah, señor! Alas, señor, there has been no kindness here to-day!"

I reached down and grabbed him by the ankles and heaved him up into the air. Out from his pockets came a rain of silver and coppers that rattled on the floor of the veranda of the store; some of the coins rolled into the deep dust of the street and a few of them slipped down through the cracks in the boards.

Then I give him a toss to one side, and he spun through the air, looking as though he was going to land on his head. He didn't, because he was as active as a cat. He righted himself while he was still sailing through the air and hit the ground on hands and feet.

He was a surprise, that little scalawag. Instead of busting out into bawling because he'd lost all that money, he ripped a couple of man-sized Spanish cuss words at me. Then a voice behind me cried:

"Jump, señor!"

I didn't wait to ask why I ought to jump. I did it, and got back through the door of the store just as a wink of light come jump through the air where I had been standing. There was a knife, sticking into the door jamb and humming like an overgrown hornet.

"That Pepillo ees wan devil, no?" said the storekeeper.

"Say it in Spanish," said I. "I know the lingo."

"He will hang soon."

He didn't seem to take the kid serious, in spite of the knife. He just stood up there and grinned out at the street, where Pepillo was ferreting the coins out of the dust.

The boy kept one eye on his work and the other eye on me all the time. He talked, too—with hand and tongue; he was sure ambidexterous.

I give you some idea of the language that that kid was capable of, leaving out all the high spots that might hurt your ears if they're sensitive to such stuff.

"Gringo dog," said this Pepillo, "one night I shall come where you sleep and put a knife between your ribs. Or perhaps I shall rip you up, son of a thief! Come out, coward, to fight with me. I have still another knife! I do not fear you! Come, pig face!"

I pulled the knife out of the wood where he had stuck it, and I threw it back into the dust.

"You little snake." said I, "does your mamma know what you're about?"

"My mamma watches me from the blue heaven and puts a curse on all gringo dogs," said this kid.

I heard the storekeeper chuckling behind me. Matter of fact, I couldn't help laughing, too; there was so much venom in that kid and so little fear.

He reached for the knife that I had thrown down into the dust in front of him, and I waved my arm so that the shadow swung over him. Well, sir, the way that kid sidestepped out of the way of any chance of danger was a caution. He threw his knife almost with his back turned to me, I thought. The blade skinned along a quarter of an inch from my temple. A little nearer, and it would of slipped through my eye into my brain, and that would of been the end of Blondy Kitchin.

I dunno why I wasn't madder or more scared. That kid just tickled me, really. For one thing, he was so doggone handsome. Again, as he stood there ripping out cusses and telling me where I was bound to go when I went West, his voice had a sort of sweetness to it—like a bird, only a bird that was singing very mad. He tickled me more'n any kid that I ever seen before. First thing that I knew, I'd grabbed a dollar out of my pocket and heaved it at his head.

He put up his hand and snatched the flash of that coin out of the air, and he stood there looking down to it in his palm. I dunno that ever he had

seen a whole dollar before, by the look on his face. You would of thought that I had handed him a ticket to heaven.

CHAPTER V.

TRANSACTIONS.

"WHAT is your name?" I asked the storekeeper.

"Gregorio," said he. "I am Gregorio, son of Pedro Oñate——"

"Hold on, Gregorio," said I; "I just want a name to call you by, not a song to sing to you!"

"Ah, well, señor!" He was pretty good-natured. It was plain that he was sort of tickled by me giving the dollar to the kid after the knife heaving.

"Have you got any saddles here?" I asked.

"Señor!" he cried, waving to the front of the store, where there was a whole mob of them saddles.

"Sure," said I; "they're leather to sit in. But have you got any saddles?"

He give me a look. You see, a fancy saddle is about one half of a Mexican's life. Then he said:

"Señor, as one gentleman to another, I shall show you a saddle which any caballero would be proud to sit in."

He goes back in the store and pretty soon he brings out a humdinger, all set over with silver whatnots. I give it a look, and it sounded to me. What I wanted to do was to go out to the bunk house on that ranch, not like a fancy tramp, but with a gun and a saddle on me, like I really belonged on the range, and like I had done something that was worth while on the range. A good saddle would be a pretty fair proof of it. This saddle was a corker, all worked with fine carvings and covered with polished silver.

"How much?"

Gregorio closed his eyes. "Ah, when I think how much I gave for it! But, no—I can never hope to get that much out of it! Besides, I like you, señor, and for my friends I have no thought. Money does not exist. To you, then, señor, I give this saddle away—for four hundred dollars!"

It give me a start, the naming of a price like that for just a saddle. When I come to look at the thing closer, and fingered it, I felt like I had to have it. I was pretty sure that a saddle like that would show those hard eggs on the Randal ranch that I was no freeze-out.

Just then a little voice piped up at my shoulder: *"Mas sabe el loco en su casa, que el cuerda en la ajena."*

Which is one of them neat Spanish proverbs, meaning that a fool in his own house knows a lot more than a wise man does away from home.

I looked around, and there was that Pepillo. He had sneaked into the store without making a noise, in his bare feet.

Gregorio had seemed to like the kid well enough when he seen him in the street. Inside of the store it was a different story.

"Little thief and son of a thief," yelled Gregorio, "have I not told you that if I found you in my store again——"

He laid a hand on the counter, like he would jump over and squash that kid flat. Pepillo just stood where he was, and lifted up one foot to scratch the heel of it on his other shin. His feet, they was so small and so soft, pretty near like a baby's. It made me see how young he was. He stuck out his chin and made a face at Gregorio.

"Old fat fool!" he cried. "Do you think that I fear you, when I have found a friend such as this señor?"

He put his arm through mine, as free as you please. Well, I was plumb tickled. It give me a sort of a nice, warm feeling all over, though I knew that the little devil was just throwing a bluff to work me and keep a high hand over Gregorio. Gregorio got madder than ever. He looked from the kid to me, saying:

"Do not be deceived, señor. This little rat, for a whole fortnight he has been in this city, making friends and using them and losing them again when he is through with them. The little thief has a charm in his hands. He steals a watch while you smile at him!"

I looked down at the kid and asked, "Look here, Pepillo, d'you steal?"

He cocked his head up at me and looked at me trustingly out of them big brown eyes of his. Or was they black? I never can make out. And he answered:

"Si, señor!"

"What!" I yelled at him. "Are you a thief?"

"Si, señor," said he, as cool as a water lily, "and what I steal I sell to this Gregorio."

Gregorio ripped out a couple of cusses and reached for a black snake. His face was pretty red, and I guessed that there must be something in what the kid had said.

"Leave Pepillo be," I said, "and let's get on with the saddle. What you know about this here saddle, Pepillo?"

"I know the gentleman who sold it to Gregorio," said Pepillo.

"It is a lie!" cried Gregorio, but he looked pretty sick.

"He was very ill, that gentleman," says Pepillo. "He had sold everything except this one saddle. He asked five hundred dollars for it and said that it cost him a thousand. Gregorio said, 'Who will buy a used saddle that another man has sat in?' And he bought the saddle for eighty dollars!"

"When I come to die——" begun Gregorio, very solemn.

"Here, Gregorio," I busted in, "you and me want to do some business. But we ain't got any extra time on our hands. I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars for that saddle. That's pretty near a hundred per cent on your investment."

"When a rat squeaks, do you believe it?" asked Gregorio. "This boy is the son of the devil. And all the city knows it. I should be bankrupt if I——"

"Put the saddle away then," I said. "There's a thirty-dollar saddle at the door that would suit me good enough."

He picked up the saddle, but his motions were pretty slow. Finally he said: *"Amigo mio,* though I lose money dreadfully, still I should like to see a true caballero sitting in this saddle. Is there any man as worthy as you, my dear friend? No, you shall have it—for two hundred dollars!"

Well, it was worth that money and a lot more. Just the silver work would of cost a lot more, so I paid the cash, though Pepillo groaned and wiggled, saying that it was robbery.

Next I got me a big leather carryall —one of them expansive things that you can crowd everything into up to a whole hoss. I bought me enough junk to pretty well fill it out, and everything was amazing cheap. Then it come to guns, and I had Gregorio show me a whole rack filled with Colts. I looked them all over. Matter of fact, they was all new looking and very fine, but new looks wasn't what I wanted. I pretended to try them all and not to like the balance of them.

"Gregorio," said I, "I ask for a gun, but I mean that I wish to have a friend that can be relied upon. Do you understand?"

He understood nearly everything, that Gregorio, and now he squinted at me. He hesitated for a long time.

"Señor," said he, "you have been a good customer. And here is a little treasure that I have been keeping for myself. But what can a man keep from a good friend? Here is a gun which has been proved—I dare not say by whom!"

He pulled out from his own clothes an old-fashioned Colt. He handed it to me, and I give it a look. It had a

wooden handle that was black with time and polished by a lot of fingering. I looked it all over. On the under side of the barrel I seen seven little notches that had been filed into the good steel.

I knew what that meant. This here gun had killed seven men. It had just that sort of a mean look, I can tell you. It couldn't of been more to my taste; I wanted to tote a gun along with me that would look pretty bad and dangerous to the boys out there on the ranch, if they was to see it.

Gregorio wanted forty dollars, which was highway robbery for an old gun like that. I had to pay twenty-five before I could get it—and the luck that went along with it.

"Because," whispered Gregorio, "the señor who owned this gun, after all, died in a peaceful sick bed. Is it not strange?"

It suited me. I stowed the gun away and carried my saddle and carryall out to the veranda, while Gregorio went to get me a buckboard that would take my stuff around to the hotel. Pepillo waited with me on the veranda. I handed him a five-dollar bill—which was small pay for all the money that he had saved me in the store. He looked at the bill without a lot of interest, I thought, seeing how one dollar had seemed to mean so much to him before.

"Ah, well, señor," said he, "you are to go away, then?"

"And you, Pepillo?"

"Heaven knows, señor," said he, "but it will be a long time before I meet another of whom I am afraid."

"Hey! You mean that you're afraid of me?"

"My ankles still burn like fire where you caught them. The devil is in those big hands of yours. Why should I not fear you? If I cursed you and threw knives—that was only a greater token that I feared you the more!"

He was a puzzler, that kid. I took to him a lot, I can tell you. By the sick sort of a way that he opened his eyes and looked up to me, you would of thought that he was feeling pretty bad, too. Gregorio come around the corner with the buckboard.

"Gregorio," I hollered all at once. "give this boy some clothes and shoes and such and fix him up. He is my *mozo;* he goes with me!"

CHAPTER VI.

SASSY OR SERIOUS.

THAT speech came busting out of me. as you might say, out of the largeness of the heart. I felt as though I was offering somebody the world. I guess that I expected this here young Pepillo to fall on his knees or something and give thanks for what I intended to do for him. Instead he hauled off and give me an ugly eye, saying, "What *mozo?*"

"You, of course."

"Me?" cried Pepillo, raising his eyebrows up to the top of his forehead and jabbing his thumb into his breast. "Did you say Pepillo?"

"Sure; I've sort of took a fancy to you. I'm gunna make you, kid. I'm gunna dress you up like you was a millionaire. I'm gunna make you look like a gentleman!"

You should of seen his face. It went sort of black. "Ha, ha!" Pepillo was trying to laugh but only choking. "It is a good joke. I laugh—I laugh. *You* are to make a gentleman of me. You are to make me a—it is too much! And I am the son of——"

He stopped himself with such an effort that his teeth barely clicked in time to shut back the word, and his lips remained grinning back, so that he looked like a young wolf.

"You are the son of who?"

"Your master, gringo swine!" said this young brat, and he poured out a

stream of Spanish cussing that fair made my hair rise. You could say this for that Pepillo's system of cussing—he didn't leave nothing out. He started right in at the beginning, and he traced all my family tree.

If any other kid had tried to hand such a line of talk to me, I would have tied him up and skinned him alive as a starter. After that, I would have taught him manners. Pepillo was different. Right in the midst of his cussing and his raging and his raving, it was sort of entertaining, if you know what I mean. If you had been there to watch him, you would of said that the graceful way he had was like a bird, putting its head from side to side while it sung lustily.

Pepillo was that way—like a singing bird. That voice of his was never nothing but musical. It was sort of a pleasure to be cussed by Pepillo. It wasn't any ordinary cussing, either. He used his wits and made it interesting. I wish that I could remember exactly how he would light in and dress anybody down, but his tongue moved just a shade faster than my thoughts could travel. He was always a jump around the corner from my memory.

"All right, Pepillo," said I. "I am a gringo swine while there is nobody else around but you and me. You savvy? But the minute that another gent hears you using language like that on me, I'll be right up and break you in two!"

He seemed to like that idea. He stopped cussing and began to laugh at me and at the whole idea, and you could see that he was tickled all over.

"Then, señor," says he, "you would have me to be your *mozo*. and what would you do for me?"

"I would keep you in decent clothes." said I. "I would see that you got a chance at schooling, even if I had to teach you myself——"

Pepillo put back his head and laughed again. Dog-gone me if it wasn't a queer sensation to let myself be laughed at by anybody, particularly by a little runt of a kid like that. But he had that sort of a silly, sweet sound to his laughter, like the same as he had in his cussing, and I liked to hear it.

"All right, señor," said Pepillo, "and what else will you do for me?"

"Teach you manners."

"How?"

"This way," said I, making a pass at him.

I grabbed thin air. He was just a mite faster moving than the lash of a four-horse whip when it curls over to snap the haunches of the near leader.

"You would beat me?" asked Pepillo, dropping his head a little to one side.

"I would give you such a licking as nobody else could ever improve on, if I had the running of you, youngster!"

"So!" said Pepillo. "I am to be beaten and taught manners. and sent to school, maybe. And what else will you do?"

It appealed to something serious in me and I said: "Look here, kid, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll start in and make a change in you. I'll keep you dressed clean and decent. I'll see that you have enough to eat—that nothing too much is ever asked of you. Besides that, I'll see to it that you get some of the bad ideas out of your head. I'll see that you turn straight. You got the makings of a good-for-nothing thief, and d'you know what comes of thieves and suchlike, kid?"

"Ah," said Pepillo, making his eyes as big as moons, "tell me!"

"They die with a rope around their throats."

"So!" gasped out Pepillo. "Ah, señor!"

"You little devil," said I, "you're laughing at me, ain't you? But I tell you—what you need is a master, and I'll be one to you. I've been through things myself, kid, and I know how to

keep you from having to go through the same thing. You hear me talk?"

Pepillo leaned up against the side of the store, thinking very hard. He looked up to me, once or twice, with a smile in his eyes and on his lips, as if he was thinking what an awful lark it would be and what an awful fool he would make out of me. Then he said:

"You might beat me, señor. You might take a very cruel whip and beat me—but if you laid a hand on me, señor, I should stab you to the heart!"

He looked like he meant it, too; he was about as meek and submissive as a young wolf.

"All right. I'll treat you decent. But if you join up with me, you got to promise that you'll stick to your side of the contract for a whole year. Understand, before I blow in the price of a suit of clothes and all the rest on you."

"You shall have my hand on it!" said he.

I reached out and flicked a forefinger under his throat. Sure enough, I got hold of a silk string and jerked out a little ebony cross worked with fine gold and even set with jewels.

"No handshaking!" I cried. "You'll swear by the cross that you wear around your neck, youngster!"

He had clapped both hands over the cross and turned red and then pale. He was all worked up.

"You dog—you son of a dog—you bull-faced, big-jawed, stupid-eyed——"

"Go on," said I, "and when you get tired, let me know when you will talk sense again."

He was a queer kid. All at once he stood up straight, and he said, "What shall I swear to you, señor, and what is your name?"

"Kitchin is my name. Mostly they call me Blondy, you know."

"That's not a name."

"My real name is a joke."

"I cannot swear to a false name," said he, very serious.

"It would spoil my time on the range if it was knowed," said I. "But as a matter of fact my front name is really Percival! That's a hot one, ain't it?"

"Then what am I to swear to you, Don Percival?"

"To stick by me for a year and to do what you're told all that time."

"And you, señor?"

"I'll give you my word that I'll treat you fair and square, on my word of honor."

Pepillo nodded. "Your word of honor is good enough for me," said he. He was tremendous serious as he went on: "I am a very bad boy, señor. I have done much wrong in my life. And if you can make me into a good man——"

Even in spite of his seriousness there was something about that that made him bust out laughing. When he sobered up, he grabbed hold on his cross, and he tilted his head up to the sky and he said, soft and shaky:

"I shall work for you and serve you in all things, help me, God!"

He looked down slowly toward the earth again and stood there a while, thinking.

"Hey, Pepillo," said I, "smile, will you?"

"Ah, Señor Kitchin, it is a serious thing. It is a year out of my life, but I give it into your hands because I know that you will take care of me!"

He walked into the store to get fitted out by Gregorio, and I tried to figure out whether I liked him best sassy or serious. When he was serious there was something about him that sort of scared me.

In another minute I could hear him chirping in the store as gay as ever, and swearing at Gregorio, and beating the prices down. That was a relief, I can tell you!

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Cease Firing!

By Paul Ellsworth Triem

Author of "The Crashing Bowlder," etc.

WITH a tremendous effort, "Cooney" Gordon opened his eyes and gave heed to the disturbance which had awakened him. It was nearly evening, the old man perceived—he knew this by the parallelogram of ruddy light slanting in on his cabin floor. Moreover, the white-faced hornets had resumed their fly hunting, which had been interrupted by the heat of midday. One of them zoomed down out of the darkness which hid the rafters, presumably in pursuit of a fly. It landed on Cooney's neck, and promptly thrust home a stinger which felt like a red-hot crowbar.

Mr. Gordon leaped from his bunk, fully awake now. He slapped the hornet to the floor and stepped on it, then hustled out the door and headed for the log barn. There was a can of ointment on a shelf back of the stalls that the veterinary in town had given him for harness gall. Cooney earnestly desired to try the assuaging effects of this remedy on his injury. He had hardly thrust his long, limber body into the desolate ranch yard, however, when he was confronted by a dozen head of shorthorns and perhaps half as many cayuses. They were milling about in the yard, raising a stifling cloud of alkali dust, and obviously awaiting anxiously the rancher's appearance. It was the sound of their pawing hoofs that had spoiled his nap, he realized, as he glowered resentfully at them.

"In the name of Moses!" Cooney cried, "what you want to come busting down hyar fer? Ain't the foothills big enough fer you? Ain't they room enough in all the valleys and draws of Cañon County, but you've got to come lumbering down hyar and tromp up the dust under my nose? What in sin ails ye, anyway? You, Doc—why'n't you head 'em away from the cabin?"

Doc, a venerable and mild-looking cayuse, thrust his countenance through the crowd of switching, stamping brutes and eyed his master reproachfully.

Shouldering the others aside, he tramped solemnly out and up to the old man. He extended his muzzle and seemed about to give the old rancher a kiss.

"Go 'way from me, you old hyena!" Cooney exclaimed. "Wha's the matter with you galoots, anyhow? Feed enough—water enough——"

Here old Cooney broke off, his face suddenly hardening. He stared at the cattle. They were in good flesh, for the time of year; during fly season they always lost a little weight—but there was a greedy look in the bulging eyes that told its own story. The rancher surveyed them silently during the course of another long minute. A cloud of angry color was sweeping up under the tan of his cheeks.

"So, that's it?" he muttered. "Wired in my spring, has he? Old galoot—allays said he would. Claimed it was on his land. Waal, I reckon it's time I showed old 'Zack' Downs who's boss around hyar. Sure looks that a way! I ain't no hand for picking a row, but that old wampus need not think he can jump all over my toes an' get away with it!"

His hornet sting forgotten, Cooney turned abruptly and journeyed back into the cabin. From the spreading antlers above the fireplace he lifted down his deer rifle. From a shelf next the door he selected a pair of wire cutters, which he dropped into a pocket. He again left the cabin, clucked briskly to the doleful horses and cattle in the ranch yard, and two minutes later was swinging along an old skid road that led through the timber. A quarter of an hour's walk brought him to a draw, running up into the hills.

The old man turned to his right and began to climb. Presently he stopped. Squarely across the cattle path he had been following—a path worn deep by the hoofs of his cows and cayuses—was stretched a four-wire fence, its shimmering gray strands and clean-cut cedar posts proclaiming its recent origin.

Behind Cooney, the thirsty stock had crowded along the skid road; now they were nuzzling at his back and elbows. The old man swore.

"Get back, dad burn ye all!" he shouted. "Doc, you old hypocrite, if you dare to bite me I'll shoot ye! Stan' back!"

They retreated before his flailing arms. Cooney again faced the fence, wire cutter in hand. He gritted his teeth as he applied the hardened steel jaws to one after another of the barbed-wire strands, hearing them sing and vibrate as he clipped through them. They snapped back, and after he had cut them Cooney Gordon twisted the ends around the two adjacent posts so that his cattle and horses would not get tangled in the dangerous stuff.

"Ain't used to store fences nohow!" he mumbled. "Stake an' rider been good enough for everybody till now. But that old infidel——"

The thirsty cows and cayuses poured through the gap in the fence, and Cooney listened for a time to the sound of their splashing muzzles. They were lined up around the cool, deep pool of the spring, which arose at the head of the draw and overflowed a short distance before it was swallowed by the thirsty sand. Satisfied that he had completed this part of his task, the old man pocketed his pliers and headed along the fence toward the homestead of his nearest neighbor, Zacharia Downs.

He walked more slowly as he reached the fringe of underbrush surrounding his ancient enemy's clearing. A flock of magpies whirred down out of the hills, their glossy black-and-white plumage distinct against the dull green of the slope beyond, their shrill voices striking on the newcomer's eardrums like the beat of a tack hammer. He scowled at them and then turned to stare in the direction whence they had

come. It might be that old Zach was up there.

Apparently he wasn't. Not that he wasn't capable of it — nothing would suit him better than to hide somewhere and ambush Cooney, as the latter tried to sneak down on the cabin. They had had a fist fight ten years ago, and had fought every time they came within shouting distance of each other ever since. This matter of the spring, which both old men claimed, had been hanging fire long enough. Apparently there wasn't enough water for both, and without plenty of water a homestead isn't worth much.

Cooney presently reached the edge of the clearing. A big log barn loomed a hundred yards in front of him; at one corner, tied to a stout post, stood two Western horses harnessed to a buckboard. In the rear end of the conveyance were a half dozen spools of barbed wire.

Cooney stared long and silently. There stood Zach's team—but where was Zach, himself? Hiding somewhere in the brush? Using the team for bait? The newcomer moved soundlessly back and began to circle the clearing. From time to time he peered out, looking for his enemy. There was no one in evidence, however. Soon he was standing across from the cabin, intently regarding the smokeless chimney and the half-open door.

"He mought be in thar — hiding!" Cooney told himself. "He'd know sartain sure that I'd be over arter him. Mought be hiding!"

Resolutely he stepped out of the brush, rifle easily balanced in his strong right hand. He began to walk across to the little building. A glance over his shoulder showed him that the ranch yard and the environs of the big log barn were still desolate, as far as any sign of human activity went.

A shiver went up and down the old homesteader's back — there was something uncanny in the situation. He suddenly cast aside his theory of an ambush. It wouldn't hold water. Striding up to the door, he rapped peremptorily upon it.

At the sound that next moment issued from inside the shack, Cooney Gordon felt his scalp turning numb, and his heart pounding in his ears. It was the sound of a thick, inhuman voice—a wordless, babbling voice; it came from the dusky cabin room before him. For the space of a dozen heartbeats he stood staring with wide eyes into the shadows.

The voice came again. It added itself to other details—the harnessed team, standing tied at the corner of the barn; the absence of the master of the place. The newcomer stepped across the threshold. There was something lying in the heavy dusk in the farther corner. He approached and stooped; it was old Zach himself, his burly old body drawn up into a contorted, unnatural posture.

Cooney lighted the tin lamp on the table. By its light he discovered that his neighbor—and enemy—had been wounded somewhere in the back, and that his heavy flannel shirt was stained with crimson. The old man was unconscious, but by the time Cooney had half dragged and half lifted him to his bunk his eyes flickered open.

"He follered me—from the store!" he muttered. "Mus' hev seen my poke'n follered me out hyar'n come up behint. Stuck a knife into me——" His whisper was trailing off into silence.

Cooney leaned close to the ashen lips. "Who done it, Zach?" he demanded fiercely. "Don't let yourself slip—stand stiddy now!"

The old homesteader's whisper came again, more faintly. "'San Diego Pete' —breed——"

The whisper thickened into a moan. The old man lying on the bunk stiffened suddenly, arching his body like a bent bow. Then he relaxed; his grizzled

head rolled to the side, and he ceased breathing.

Cooney Gordon sprang to his feet. For another long moment he stood staring incredulously down at the silent figure of his old neighbor. Many a pleasant fight had they had—their fights had ranged from verbal tilts to fisticuffs. They had fought over strayed cattle, over unbranded calves, water rights, and the origin of forest fires in the cañons surrounding their holdings. Most of all, they had fought over the division line, and the crystal-clear spring which was close to it. Now all this genial bickering—all this delightful warfare—was over. Zach was slain, by a treacherous breed—by San Diego Pete!

The old man's anger crystallized into action. He could do nothing for old Zach, except avenge his death. Very definitely there came to him, as he crossed to the door and went out into the evening, certain details concerning this dark-faced, sullen-eyed fellow.

Pete was a product of civilization—its more destructive side. He had straggled up in the little frontier town and its environs; had learned to ride and to shoot—and to drink and gamble. He had absorbed the old legends of the days of the bandits; of the exploits, magnified by time, of such men as "Billy the Kid," "Black Bart," and others of their ilk. The final product of all this wrongly directed education was—"San Diego Pete," who had now blossomed out as a murderer.

Old Cooney's face was very grim as he made his way across to the log stable and began to unhitch the cayuses. The crime was reconstructing itself before his pondering eyes—his neighbor's trip into town for more barbed wire for the disputed line fence; his inadvertent display, in the store, of a well-filled poke; the subsequent return trip home, with Pete shadowing him and finally stealing up behind to strike the murderous blow.

Dried perspiration on the two horses brought a frown of deeper anger into his grim face.

"He mought hev turned the hosses loose," Cooney muttered. "No need to mistreat a dumb beast, jus' because you've stuck a knife into a man. Never mind—after I've turned the hosses loose I'm goin' arter this hombre, an' I'm goin' to bring him back hyar an' see that jestice is did!"

It never occurred to Cooney that the task he had set himself was more properly the work of the sheriff and of the courts. Murder had been done. There was no question as to who had done it. The inference was obvious—San Diego must be captured as speedily as possible and hanged, preferably on the spot where he had committed the crime. It was all in the day's work, and he could attend to it as well as another.

He caught up a fresh horse from the hillside pasture, saddled and bridled it, and set off. He remembered a winter afternoon when he had been deer hunting across the divide, in the great river valley, and had come out for a moment upon a spur, thickly covered with jack pine and overlooking a cove hidden in the mountains. Smoke had curled up from a crevice in the snow-coated rocks before him; presently he had seen San Diego Pete thrust his sinister face out of the mouth of a cave and peer intently around.

Cooney had withdrawn without betraying his presence. Now he had a hunch, amounting to conviction, that the breed would have headed for this cove. That would be in line with the methods of the old-time bandits and horse thieves, who had used caves and hidden valleys for their headquarters.

The sun had sunk by the time the old man struck into the Indian Trail leading to the summit of the divide. It was slow going, and he had to depend much on the keen eyesight and the surefootedness of his cayuse, satisfying himself with keeping the animal headed

toward the summit. It was close to midnight, judging by the position of the constellations, by the time they topped the rising ground and plunged into the great trough of the river valley.

The old-timer, seated slouchingly in his saddle, his rifle balanced in front of him, caught intermittently the distant roar of "tumwater" — white, tumultuous rapids, pounding against rock-rimmed shores The sound rose and fell, according to his position on the trail. At other times a shower of rocks, detached by the hoofs of the cayuse, would rattle over the verge. He would hear them go bounding down the precipitous cañon sides; strike, moments later, against some ledge — where his body also would strike, if the horse stumbled and pitched them both out into the darkness of the pit.

Once a bear came crashing down from the darkness above and brought up, grunting and blowing, a hundred feet ahead. The mountain horse gathered itself together, and old Cooney could feel it quivering under him; a thousand pounds of steely sinew, waiting the impact of a breath to send it careening over the edge of the trail. He sat stolidly, his left foot freed from its stirrup. He couldn't check the terrified horse if the latter should decide to bolt, but perhaps he could free himself from the saddle.

The bear upended, sniffed the night wind, and went ambling off ahead of them. The cayuse tremblingly resumed the downward journey.

A late moon came peeking up over the ridge to the east, and the old man was able to get his bearings. He drew the horse to a standstill and for a time sat studying the topography of the little valley into which he had descended. The roar of the river came muffled and indistinct.

"That thar draw Pete's cave is in, mus' open off close to hyar!" he told himself. "Reckon I better light an' hitch—no use trying to ride up onto him. You warm, boy? Don't like to tie you this a way, but it can't be helped!"

After securing the cayuse, he set off on foot along an ancient cattle path. It took him gradually down and then up. He paused and studied the moonlit slopes above. There was the pine-clad spur he had stood on that winter afternoon—and Pete's cave must be very close to his present position. He went forward more cautiously.

Through the soft darkness of the lower valley there came to him the glow of coals. He stopped and stood intently listening; there was no sound, save the murmur of the river, low and crooning now. Soundlessly he again advanced. His foothill training served him well. His feet felt their way along the path with silent precision. He reached a little flat—a circular space perhaps fifty feet in diameter. He could make out that the coals he had discovered came from what was left of a small cooking fire; beside it opened the black mouth of a cave.

A step at a time Cooney advanced around the margin of the cove. He reached the fire and paused. There was another sound—the heavy breathing of a human being, close to him but invisible. He dropped to his knees, and, after a moment of consideration, laid his rifle aside. Forward again, moving as stealthily as a king snake. He was inside the mouth of the cave; there before him, facing the opening, lay the man he had come to find.

Pete was snoring. Evidently the crime he had committed so recently was not worrying him.

In the last moment Cooney's blood turned seething hot. He leaped upon the prostrate figure of the breed, caught him by the throat, and, kneeling upon his writhing body, felt him fight and kick and twist, as the breath was slowly choked out of his lungs. Presently

Pete lay still, and old Cooney cautiously relaxed his throat hold, and fumbled about for the outlaw's weapons. There were three of them—two pistols and a murderous knife, which he wore down his back after the fashion of his mother's people.

Using San Diego Pete's trouser belt for a rope, Cooney fastened his prisoner's wrists behind his back and got briskly to his feet. The cave enlarged at this point, some ten feet from the entrance, into a sizable room. He struck a match, discovered a tallow candle stuck into the mouth of a bottle, and lighted that. By the time the flame had steadied into a mellow glow of orange-colored light, the breed was twisting about, cursing through his teeth, and looking snarlingly up at his captor. Cooney searched till he found a baking-powder can, from which he drew a buckskin poke, heavy with the gold coin dear to old-time Westerners.

"Waal, Pete, seems like I got you with the goods right handy!" he observed. "All right, just hist yourself up on your hind laigs, an' we'll get a-going. You don't hanker to go along with me? *Thar's* my first argumint, an' I got plenty more jus' like it!"

The toe of a hobnailed shoe, applied none too gently to the killer's ribs, brought San Diego Pete staggering to his feet. The veins stood out on his sloping forehead as he strained at his leashed wrists.

"You leave me go—I cut your throat!" he muttered.

"Thanks—but I expec' you've done enough cutting an' slashing for *one* time. Move along out of hyar, an' don't make no mistakes abouten running such. I ain't aimin' to slatter you hyar—ruther take you across the ridge on the hoof. But I ain't nowise particular, neither. Sure, bust an' try to run if you want to!"

Outside the cave, the old man repossessed himself of his rifle. He drove the outlaw before him to the spot where he had tied his horse.

"Reckon you'll hev to walk," he commented. "Mush, now, you bad man!"

Pete "mushed." His tigerish face was gray and glistening in the white moonlight. From time to time he worked convulsively at the leather strap which bound his wrists together—but he tramped steadily up the trail. The old man, riding alertly behind, cuddled the stock of his rifle in his horny hands. In this fashion, the killer stumbling ahead, the old homesteader, who had captured him, bringing up the rear, the little procession made its way up the trail and over the divide. The eastern sky was paling, and the great white moon growing thin and misty by the time they had descended the farther slope and were making their way into the bleak ranch yard surrounding the cabin of San Diego Pete's victim.

Cooney Gordon slid stiffly from his horse, removed saddle and bridle, and turned the animal loose.

"Aim to let you hev a look at what you done, Pete," he explained as he faced his prisoner. "Keep a movin'—straight ahead. No, we ain't headin' back for the hills—you know whar you done it, as well as me. Head for the cabin."

The breed flinched at that, and turned his gray, glistening face toward his captor.

"I didn't knife him!" he muttered. "If he say that——"

"Hush up. You know darn well you was the hombre that done it! If not, how come you to know it was a knife that finished him off, 'stead of a gun? Mush, now!"

San Diego obeyed. His legs shook under him, and once he stumbled and nearly fell. Cooney prodded him with the muzzle of his rifle.

"Stiddy! You ain't much of a bad man! Thar's the cabin, an'——"

He paused, his own jaw dropping, his eyes wide with fear. A voice had come quaveringly out of the house of death—a wild, unearthly voice. San Diego Pete dropped to his knees and groveled in the weeds. Cooney listened, then again prodded him with the gun.

"I seen him draw his last breath!" he mumbled. "That must be his harnt, San Diego! But we're a-goin' in, if the house is full of 'em!"

The half-breed was in a condition almost of collapse, but old Cooney, his face broken out now into a mist of perspiration, prodded him to his feet and drove him toward the cabin. The unearthly voice came again, high-pitched, then dropping to a sepulchral groan.

Cooney was beginning to get his bearings. He was too hardheaded to believe in ghosts, and there was a substantiality to these sounds that helped him on to reality. He drove his captive up to the half-open cabin door and through it.

Old Zach had thrown himself from the bunk to the floor, and was lying with his ashen face and wild eyes turned toward the ceiling. San Diego Pete stared at him, his loose jaw sagging, his neck thrust forward. Cooney Gordon crossed and knelt beside the wounded homesteader. Evidently he had suffered from some form of syncope the evening before — afterwards coming back to life; he had probably put in a terrible night here alone. Cooney tried to pick him up and lift him into his bunk. The injured man fought him off, raising his voice into a series of raucous yells.

Cooney stood up and for a moment stared ponderingly around. Then he turned to the breed, whose bonds he released.

"You take holt down by his knees," Cooney commanded. "Step lively—now help me li' him into his bed. So—easy, Zach! This is me—Cooney! An' this here is your old friend, San Diego Pete—what stuck the knife into you. I fetched him back, an' now you got to hustle and get well so's we can settle with him. *Easy!*"

The old homesteader was delirious, and the subsequent process of cutting his flannel shirt away and cleansing out the knife wound resembled a rough-and-tumble fight. Cooney thought longingly of the doctor, thirty miles away across the hills—but the wound was not as deep as he had feared it would be. After all, doctors were a luxury, in which foothill men couldn't often indulge. There was no way of getting one here now.

At the end of an hour, he had finished his work. He had opened the partially closed wound, and had cleansed it with a solution of the purple crystals of potash kept by most of the homesteaders for use in case of snake bite. Now a clean compress was fastened lightly on the orifice. Cooney was enough of a surgeon to know that drainage must be provided for.

Having attended the major business on hand, the old man turned his attention to his prisoner. San Diego Pete had been too cowed and weary from the various vicissitudes of the night to think of flight. Cooney took him out to the log stable and in the tight-walled granary established a disciplinary barracks.

Zach Downs was a desperately sick man for the rest of that week, but by Sunday he began to mend. Cooney tended him day and night. He had used the permanganate solution and had added to his pharmacopœia by bringing over from his own ranch a box of salve he had procured in town when one of his work horses developed a fistula on the shoulder. With these two heroic remedies, both of which burned and stung like fire, he tended the wound, keeping it open till it began to heal from the bottom by the process of granulation.

The dread symptoms of blood poisoning abated; old Zach's eyes again became clear and his skin cool. Once convalescent, his immense vitality did the rest. Three weeks after he had been struck down by the blow of San Diego Pete, he was striding masterfully about his own ranch yard, looking into the condition of his small orchard, his cattle, and his cayuses.

Cooney accompanied him on these trips of inspection. He explained meekly to the irritable old man of the hills what he had done in his behalf.

"An' now, Zach," he commented, when these details were disposed of, "I got something to show you that'll be mighty interesting. I reckon you don't remember the morning I got back to your place, expecting to find you laid out an' ready to be planted—an' 'stead of that found you whooping like a loon? No? Waal, I brung a friend of yourn with me, and he's been waitin' out hyar in the granary for you to git well enough to talk to him. Come on!"

Zach gave his neighbor a suspicious glance, but followed along into the cool interior of the log barn. A heavy spike was removed from the hasp on the outside of the plank door, and next moment Cooney hauled out San Diego Pete, blinking and grimacing in the light.

"Hyar he is!" Cooney commented with a grin, shoving his prisoner before him into the big, empty hay barn. "This is the playful leetle stranger that slipped up behint an' let six inches or so of cold steel into you. Zach! I kep' him till you got well enough to sit by an' see fair play——"

Old Zach's wintry eyes shifted from the face of the breed to that of Cooney Gordon. San Diego Pete started and also stared at the man who had captured him.

"Fair play — what you mean, fair play?" Zach demanded.

"Waal, you didn't die, so I can't hang him like I intended when I fotched him over hyar. But contrariwise, I sure ain't goin' to turn him loose with nary a lick nor a kick to remember what he done by! So I kep' him locked up, feeding an' watering of him like any other brute beastie till you got strong enough to set up on a box or something——"

Zach's face showed that he understood. Also, by its rising flush, it betrayed his kindling indignation.

"*Me* set on a box while you lambast the feller that tried to carve me?" he cried. "I guess you don't exactly remember whose ranch this is, ner who you're a talkin' to! Just you get up on that thar powder drum yourself, and hold my coat——"

Cooney had put up with all manner of slights and provocations from old Zach, charging them to the account of illness and to the unreasonableness of convalescence. He had listened to caustic criticisms of his way of managing Mr. Downs' affairs while that worthy was *hors de combat*. But there is a limit to the most exaggerated toleration, and now he felt that that limit had been passed.

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" he cried, his wind-burned face showing the deeper scarlet of wrath. "I brung him over hyar——"

"An' kep' him in *my* barn! An' it was *me* he stuck a knife into! So you'll jes' set up thar——"

Cooney's lips were compressed. He stretched out a hand and laid it on his neighbor's arm, intent on escorting him to a seat against the wall. Old Zach snorted like a cayuse and jerked back.

"Le' go me!" he exclaimed. "Take your paw off my arm, or by thunder——"

Cooney clung more firmly and tried to lead the wrathful old gentleman out of the purposed arena. Zach shied away and laid his own massive paw on his companion's shoulder.

Next moment the spark of dispute was applied to the gunpowder of their long-accumulating grievances, and they were locked together, swaying, grunting, tugging, threatening.

Cooney got the under hold, his hands clasped against the small of his enemy's back, his grizzly chin thrust against old Zach's shoulder.

"Quit fooling, you old reptile!" he muttered through his clenched teeth. "Give up——"

"Give up your grandmother!" Zach cried back, flailing out with one hob-nailed shoe and striving to kick Cooney's feet from under him. "You pin-headed hill billy—I'll learn you to trifle with me! You been getting in my way long enough."

But at this moment Cooney succeeded in doing what Zach had been trying to do. He kicked his antagonist's feet from under him, and the two went to the hard-packed earth floor with a mighty thud. Cooney landed on top, but next moment was flopped expertly over and felt the weight of his burly neighbor's body astride his own.

Old Zach landed on his stomach and for a moment jounced up and down, crowing triumphantly.

"Come over hyar to my place an' try to tell me——" he cried.

Pride goeth before destruction to-day just as it did in the times of King Solomon. Cooney was down, but a good man is never out. With a mighty buck he shot his captor over his head. Before Zach could collect his sprawling arms and legs, Cooney had pounced on him and was pumping his head up and down by the ears.

"Dang my eyes if I don't——" he muttered.

With a sudden sidewise roll, Zach Downs pitched the temporary victor to the floor and grappled with him. Thus brought to close grips, the two old men bellowed, kicked, gouged, and clawed till they were both exhausted. Their voices were husky, and they breathed like a duet of leaky blacksmith's bellows. Their faces were purple, their eyes protruded, and both had crimson-stained noses.

Cooney, for his part, felt that he had had enough to last him for the rest of his life, but he would have died rather than confess this saturation. He jerked his mighty right fist free, drew it back like the hind leg of a mule, and was about to launch what he hoped would turn out to be a finishing argument of some kind—when the blurred face of his ancient enemy underwent a startling transformation. It seemed to part in the middle, and a roar of consternation issued from the cleft.

"San Diego Peter!" shouted old Zachary. "You darned centipede, quit trying to kick me—Pete's gone!"

They got heavily to their feet, dusted themselves off, and stood glowering first at each other and then about the big empty hay barn. Without doubt San Diego Pete was gone. During one of the clinches he must have leaped across their interlocked bodies and so made his escape. With surly and distrustful side glances they hurried out into the ranch yard.

A flock of magpies swept down into the wheat field out of a thicket on the hill, their shrill voices raised in derisive greeting. A roan shorthorn came out on a point of the ridge and stood staring stolidly down. Then she thrust out her head and bawled something that sounded like a bovine guffaw.

Cooney looked out of the corners of his eyes at his companion. Old Zach was peering in the same furtive fashion at him. Slowly both old men began to grin, unwillingly and defiantly at first, then more and more broadly. They faced each other, their bruised and dislocated features beaming. The old grudge had been turned up by the heat of the recent combat.

"He got clean away!" Cooney said.

He slapped his knee and roared with Homeric laughter. "While we was punching each other's heads to see who should lick him!"

"Sure!" cried Zach. "Come to think of it, Cooney, I guess you and me is a couple of old coots—reg'lar idjuts! First we row about the line fence for ten year or so, yowling every time we meet, like a couple of bobcats. Then I sachay into town to buy wire to keep your critters out—an' get San Diego Pete on my trail. If we kep' it up much longer, I reckon one of us *mought* get hurt. But I been thinking——"

He paused, to stare dubiously at his old neighbor. Then he nodded his massive head and concluded.

"Sure, they ain't really no call for argymint. The spring is on my land, sure enough, but I ain't begrudging your cattle what water they can drink. We'll cement her up, so's all the water don't seep into the sand."

Cooney nodded briskly. "I reckon the spring is on my land—couple hundred feet my side of the line. But they ain't no use our scrapping abouten it no longer, Zach. Your cattle is more'n welcome to come over any time an' drink all they can hold. An' we'll cement her up, just like you say. All these hyar years, the sand an' gravel has been drinking more than your stock an' mine put together.

"But I ain't kicking none, either—think of all the excitement we've had!"

ANCIENT SPANISH KEY HOLDS MYSTERY

A GOLD-AND-COPPER key of ancient Spanish carving and design was recently dug up by workmen in the course of a sewer excavation at the county fair grounds near Tulare, California. The key weighed half a pound and contained a large secret compartment for carrying messages or jewels. The carving on the key suggests that it was made in Europe centuries ago for church use. It was sent to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington for study, with a view to ascertaining its historical significance.

UNUSUAL FIND IN NOGAL CANYON

REPORT from Carrizozo, New Mexico, describes the finding of some curious relics in Nogal Cañon, by County Commissioner Richard Hurst. The commissioner was plowing in the cañon, when his plow struck a hard, flintlike substance. Upon examination, this proved to be the image of a bear in gold quartz of good quality. The figure weighed ninety pounds. Mr. Hurst also found numerous arrow heads and stone axes, and he inclines to the belief that the place was once an Indian graveyard.

Dead Men Tell No Tales

BY Edward Leonard

Author of "The Beloved Fugitive," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"A CROOKED ROAD!"

THROUGH a haze of tobacco smoke, the oil lamps hanging from the grimy ceiling of Palace Hall illumined a scene typical of boom times in a Western mining camp. The picturesque characters that devote their lives to following will-o'-the-wisps of fortune, from one big strike to another, had come trooping into Gulchtown. The boisterous tide of humanity had suddenly turned bleak, lonely hillsides into roaring life. Sitting at the little round tables, that stood close together on the sawdust-covered floor of the Palace, were grizzled veterans with tales of the old days in Leadville and Creede and the Klondike.

An old-timer with a walrus mustache had seen the mule whose heels had kicked up the first glint of gold at Cripple Creek. A shifty-eyed friend of Bob Ford could tell of how that luckless terror of forgotten boom towns had met his death in front of a sawed-off shotgun. A dreamy-looking man from Sonora whose face, as coppery as an Indian's, contrasted oddly with his white hair, drawled a few remarks between puffs at his pipe about the heat in the passes of the Sierra Madre. Yet prospectors, gamblers, gunmen, small capitalists, all the queer, varied assortment of men who had crowded into the hall this night, had found something far more alluring than reminiscences to hold their attention. A black-haired, blue-eyed girl, alone on a platform at one end of the room, in a song-and-dance act, held most of them spellbound. She was pretty and graceful; there was a refinement about her that didn't seem to belong to a place like the Palace. In the opinion of that hard-bitten crowd, at least, she sang for all the world like an angel.

"She's Dallas Dean's girl," muttered the old-timer with the walrus mustache.

"Who'd have thunk he'd ever be the father of a kid like that?"

"Dallas Dean!" exclaimed the man from Sonora, suddenly looking over from the next table. "The Dallas Dean that was down at Tombstone and that got sent to the pen for——"

Abruptly he checked himself, as though realizing before his question was out that it was not wise in Gulchtown to pry too closely into men's past lives. Indulging in such a pastime would not be likely to make one popular in this locality. In the careers of most of the crowd around him were chapters that were better forgotten.

For an instant the old-timer with the walrus mustache turned the corner of a reproachful eye on the man from Sonora. Then, ignoring him, he proceeded to devote his attention to the singing girl on the platform. His heavy gray eyebrows were drawn close together. He seemed to have dropped into deep thought. Many a story he could have told about Dallas Dean—and not one that was to the man's credit. This girl puzzled him; she was so out of keeping with her environment. It was hard to believe she was the daughter of a thorough-going rascal like Dean. Though she was earning a living by entertaining the hard crowds in the Palace, he had heard she had always gone straight. Instead of mixing in the rough night life of the town after her work was over, she always returned promptly to her father's cabin up the valley. Was old Dallas going straight? It wasn't likely. He had been crooked all his life. He couldn't go straight; it wasn't in him.

While the girl sang and danced to the discordant accompaniment of a tinny piano and two fiddles, the old-timer kept his eyes on her steadily. "Dallas Dean's daughter," he mused, "and they say she's going straight." Having known her father at his worst, he smiled skeptically.

Scarcely once had the girl looked in his direction. Her interest seemed to lie mostly in a shadowed corner of the hall where a tall, broad-shouldered young man was standing alone watching her as though fascinated. Like the girl, he looked to be somewhat superior to his environment, a little too clean-cut and serious and decent to have much in common with the hard-drinking crowd around him.

His name was Steve Bonner, and he had come to Gulchtown with the first rush. Since then, when not washing gravel in the placers and fattening his little bag of gold dust, he had been serving as a deputy to Sheriff Andy Rawson. Never had he found either time or inclination to mix with the hangers-on at the Palace until one night, going there with Rawson to make an arrest, he discovered Maisie Dean. After that—well, after that life seemed different to Steve Bonner. The dingy hall, where the greasy lamps sputtered in the smoke clouds and shone down on all the scum of the camp, became for him a place of enchantment. To-night he had come to his paradise with his mind full of trouble. Even the spell of fascination Maisie Dean threw over him, failed to drive the strained look of worry from his face.

Suddenly his eyes softened, and he leaned eagerly forward, quivering to the sound of her voice. She was singing "Juanita," too lovely an old song for a crowd like this. Yet they got the plaintive appeal of it, even the hardest of them.

"Juanita, Juanita, moons like this shall come again——"

The man from Sonora rose to his feet with a howl of enthusiasm, and the hall rocked to the roar of stamping heels and wild yells of approval.

"She's throwing herself away on this measly outfit," Steve Bonner muttered fiercely to himself. "It's no place for a girl like her. It makes me madder than

a rattler that she's got to earn a living this way. Poor little kid! And now there's trouble ahead for her. I've got to tell her what it is. Even though I'll be playing a dirty trick on Andy Rawson, I've got to tip Maisie off to what's up."

Presently he looked sullenly at his watch. Another entertainer had come out on the platform. Maisie, whose last number on the night's program was over, was retiring into the dressing room. In a few minutes she would be ready to go home. Steve, with no interest in the remainder of the entertainment, made his way outside to his horse. He led the animal to a shed in the rear, where Maisie's little buckskin mare was waiting for her. Then he brought the mare out, and stationed himself and the horses at the Palace's back door. It was not the first time he had waited there for Maisie. Though he had known her for scarcely two weeks, he had been seeing her home almost every night since making her acquaintance. From the time of their first meeting, the girl, who had turned a cold shoulder to the advances of other admirers, had apparently encouraged the infatuation and very flattering attentions of the strapping young deputy sheriff.

A full moon was hanging high in a cloudless sky. From where he stood, Steve could see all of Gulchtown spread out over its hollow in the hills—one short street of little business buildings, a widely scattered collection of cheap, one-story houses, shacks, dugouts and tents—the tall iron smokestacks of a crusher plant, and out beyond the edges of the settlement, the treeless slopes scarred by prospect holes and the diggings of the placer workers. Only a year ago, when he first looked on this valley, the building of the town had not even begun. How long was it going to last? Another year, and perhaps coyotes would be wandering through deserted streets, owls nesting in broken walls.

His gaze fastened on the most conspicuous building in the town, the Royal Hotel, a pretentious three-story structure of red brick. Again his boyish face was full of trouble. At this moment, in a corner of the Royal's lobby, Sheriff Andy Rawson, his yellow mustache stained with tobacco juice, his big hat tilted down over his eye, was planning a hunt for big game—human game. Less than an hour ago Steve himself had been there. Andy Rawson had said to him:

"Steve, you and me know darned well that that Dean girl's old man is mixed up in this job, and we're gonna get him. So don't you be lettin' her make a fool out of you. You're young, and she's a good looker. Be awful careful, Steve."

The rear door of the Palace was opened wide, and Maisie came out into the moonlight. He felt a thrill as she smiled at him. In the faint illumination of the night her face was as delicately white as a prairie primrose against the deep blackness of her hair. Maisie Dean and a young man of twenty-two and moonlight—there was romance in such a combination. The perfumes of pine forests filled the clear, dry air. Snow-tipped peaks glistened faintly on far horizons.

Maisie lifted her face to the shining sky. For a moment the loveliness of the night seemed to hold her spellbound. Presently, as she turned to swing herself into the saddle of the little mare, she realized that Steve was strangely silent. She shot a quick, puzzled glance at him.

"Anything wrong, Steve?" she asked anxiously.

He didn't answer. The music of the hall had died out behind them, and they were passing the last lights of the town before he spoke.

"Yes, there's something wrong,

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Maisie," he said sadly. "Something that's got me all broke up."

Again he became silent, and for a few moments Maisie checked her curiosity. They were riding up into the hills. The slopes ahead of them were covered with black forests. Somewhere in the deep shadows a brook was babbling softly. It was the only sound except the heavy breathing of the horses and the patter of their feet.

"Well, I'm listening," she said at last. "Suppose you spill the bad news. You look like a mourner at a funeral. What's happened?"

"I ought not to tell you, Maisie," he mumbled listlessly. "It wouldn't be playing square with Andy Rawson."

The girl gave a little start. "Rawson! It's something about that holdup the other night?" Her face had grown very serious, and her voice was an almost breathless whisper.

"I don't know what to say, Maisie," muttered Steve helplessly. "I know it's my duty to keep my mouth shut. I'm Andy's deputy, and he trusts me."

For a moment she studied the young man's face. "You don't have to tell me!" she exclaimed fiercely. "I know. I've heard the rumors already. People are saying my father's the leader of the gang that held up that train." She gave a petulant shrug of her shoulders. "All right! Let them keep on with their fool talk. I don't care."

It was scarcely surprising that she had heard the rumors, for Gulchtown had been buzzing with them for almost a week, ever since the night when six hundred and seventy pounds of bar gold was stolen from an express car by five masked men while on its way from the Aladdin Smelters to Denver. Suspicion had fallen on Dallas Dean as soon as it was discovered that he had been away from his home and from Gulchtown all that night. It was the kind of a job he had been guilty of many times in his long career, and he had been leading a mysterious life in his lonely cabin in the hills for months—with no known source of income except his daughter's earnings. Dallas wasn't a man who could be expected to remain idle very long; he had never been known to make an honest living.

"Your father's reputation's against him," Steve reminded her.

Maisie gave a toss of her head. "Anyway, he's my father!" she cried. "I'm going to stand by him, no matter what people say."

"He's pulled off jobs like that before, Maisie. I'm sure you must know that."

"Well, what if he has? Do you think I ought to turn against him because he hasn't always gone straight? No matter what kind of a life he may have led, he's been a good father to me. Why, Steve, I believe poor old dad would give up his life for me. There's lots worse men than he is in this world. If he was mixed up at all in this holdup—and I don't believe he was—it must have been because he was desperate. Being broke is galling to a proud old man like dad. Is that all you've got to tell me—those rumors? Andy Rawson can't prove anything, and I guess he knows it."

Steve was growing more and more miserable. He believed that disaster was waiting for Dallas Dean and that only he, himself, could save him. To save him he would have to turn traitor.

"I've got to tell you, Maisie!" he cried out suddenly after a bitter struggle with his conscience. "I can't let your old man get caught, because he's *your* father. Perhaps I can prevent it by tipping you off to what's doing. It would break your heart if they got him, and I'd never forgive myself. Tell him—tell him to stay at home to-morrow night. Tell him to keep away from his gang. Andy Rawson's laying a trap for him and the whole bunch."

He heard her give a quick catch of

her breath, but she did not speak. The rough trail they had been following was leading now into the heavy darkness of the pine woods, and, though she was riding close beside him, he could scarcely see her. He knew she was thinking deeply over what he had just told her.

"How much does Rawson know?" she demanded after a few moments.

"He'll know enough to send your father up for a life term if he catches him with the goods to-morrow night, as he's figuring on doing," he answered. "Andy knows they've cached the stuff somewhere. They wouldn't have dared carry it around with them very long. It was too heavy. Somehow he's been tipped off that to-morrow night they're going to meet for the 'divvy.' I guess he couldn't prove much now; but there'll be a different story if he gets 'em dead to rights with the loot."

As they came out into a clearing, a lighted window shone ahead of them. It was Dallas Dean's cabin.

"He's home," Maisie muttered as if to herself. As they rode up close to the cabin, she turned her eyes to Steve. The moonlight was on his face, and she could not fail to notice how thoroughly wretched he looked.

"It was good of you, Steve—to tell me," she stammered. "I know it must have come hard to give Rawson away like that. I'll never forget."

"Maisie, I feel like a cur," he said, groaning. "But what else could I do? I'd sell my soul for you."

"For Dallas Dean's daughter?" she whispered. "You're crazy, Steve. You'd better not mix up with our kind. It might ruin you. For if dad's on a crooked road that's where I'll be, too—when he needs me bad."

He turned his horse a moment later and rode away—to Andy Rawson at the Royal Hotel. Once, as he came to the end of the clearing, and the pine woods were about to swallow him up, he looked back. Maisie was standing in front of the cabin with the buckskin mare beside her, watching him. Even after he had disappeared, she still lingered there looking off wistfully through the moonlight.

"A crooked road!" she whispered. "That's what I'll be traveling if dad needs me there. I guess I better forget about Steve."

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CANON TRAIL.

IN a barely furnished room lighted by one small lamp, Dallas Dean, his grim mouth drawn tightly over the stem of a pipe, a rifle lying across his knees, sat idle and alone. The shade was closely drawn over the solitary window. His face was turned to the closed door. Though his big, rawboned figure was as still as if he were asleep, he was alert and watchful, continually ready for sudden trouble. It had been with a very definite purpose that the shade was drawn so closely, that the little lamp was turned low, that his chair was so placed that the door was squarely within range of his eyes. A bare window would have made him an easy mark for a bullet from outside. A door that could not be watched would have been a constant menace.

Thus he had sat night after night, while his daughter was away in the town, a man with all the world against him, a man who saw danger in every little sound. It was rare indeed that the stillness was broken by any sound more ominous than the cooing of a turtle-dove, the call of a coyote, or the sighing of wind. Even in the long, dead silences, his imagination could conjure pressing perils. No matter how carefully he might conceal or guard himself, he could never be sure of being safe from his past. Old, half-forgotten crimes, old feuds, were still dragging along behind him on his trail through

life, like so many sticks of dynamite. Out of that haunting past an explosion might come at any time and destroy him. He was a man who had made many enemies and scarcely a friend. His enemies—those still alive—were always dangerous. Fortunately for him, a good many of them were dead. Even if they had all been dead there would still be the always reaching arm of the law to menace him.

His eyes were watching the door steadily now, and his hands were gripping the rifle. Maisie and her young man were outside, he told himself, but he couldn't be sure. Bending over the little table that stood beside his chair, he blew out the lamp. It was well to be cautious always. Several minutes passed. Then the door opened; with a sigh of relief his tense body relaxed. The moonlight that flooded into the room revealed Maisie standing in the doorway. For a moment he sat studying her, without moving or speaking. Her unnatural silence and seriousness puzzled him. Presently, as she came softly into the room, he struck a match and relit the lamp.

"Tired?" he inquired abruptly, as he tossed her hat onto the table and sank listlessly into a chair.

"Yes." The blue eyes that turned slowly to him were full of trouble. "Tired and worried."

"Worried! What you worrying about?"

"People are talking about you, dad. They're saying you had something to do with that train holdup the other night."

Dean's gray-bearded, heavy-featured face was inscrutable. For a moment he was silent.

"Who told you this?" he demanded suddenly.

"Why, it's all over the town!" she exclaimed. "And—Steve Bonner spoke of it to-night."

"Bonner!" Her father's big body stiffened as he glared at her. "Maisie! What did he say?"

"He said a good deal more than he had a right to, dad. He gave Andy Rawson's secrets away. He told me I should warn you to stay at home tomorrow night—that Rawson had got a trap laid for you."

Her father raised his gray eyebrows in puzzled surprise. "Huh!" he grunted. "So he told you that, eh? I s'pose he figured he'd get in strong with you by playing crooked with Rawson."

Maisie flushed. "You've got him wrong, dad," she cried reproachfully. "There's nothing yellow about Steve Bonner. He didn't want to tell. He did it because—well, because he was sorry for us, I guess."

"Tell me everything he said—every word of it," Dean demanded sharply.

He listened stolidly to her recital of what Steve Bonner had told her, and made no comment. It was not until she questioned him that he spoke.

"Is it true, dad?" she asked. "Were you with that gang?"

Dean glanced at her dubiously. The question seemed to trouble him, and he pondered it for a little while before replying. "I was there," he admitted at last. "I'd been planning that job for a month."

The alarm that he saw in Maisie's face caused him to regret his confession the next instant.

"I—I'd hoped you were going straight, dad," she gasped out. "I'd thought you were through with the old kind of life for good and all."

Dean winced, as though the bitter reproach that lay in Maisie's words had stung him.

"If I can only get away with the swag, you and me will be on easy street for life, Maisie," he said appealingly. "I had to do it. I was down and out; you singing to a bunch of bums every night, to earn a living for us, made me

desperate. I've always wanted you to have the best of everything, girlie. And that's what you're going to have. We're through with trouble."

"We won't be through with it if Rawson gets you," she whispered.

"He's not going to get me."

Maisie shook her head doubtfully. "Take Steve's tip, dad, and don't go out to-morrow night."

"I've got to go out to-morrow night. If I don't I'll lose my share of the swag. That gang isn't going to bring it to me. If I don't show up they'll divvy up to suit 'emselves and leave me out of it. Maybe I'll never have another chance to make a big clean-up like this. I'm getting to be an old man. You don't want me to stay broke for the rest of my life. I'd be nothing but a burden to you. I'd rather die."

Though Maisie's sense of right and wrong was keener than Dean's, she had been brought up by him to wink an eye at banditry. Always, however, she had wanted him to go straight. Now it was rather through fear, than because of any scruples, that she began to plead with him to let the loot go and to play safe. But Dean was obdurate, and all her persuasiveness failed to shake his purpose.

"If you want me to play safe you'll come along with me to-morrow night, Maisie," he told her. "I'm going to need you. You break away early from the hall. Tell 'em you're sick. And don't let young Bonner come riding home with you."

It seemed as though, now that her fear of Rawson and his posse was slipping away, the old outlaw's blood in Maisie's veins was beginning to assert itself. "I'll come if it'll make you any safer," she agreed.

Presently, tired out, she left him alone and went into her own little room in the rear. For hours after she had fallen asleep, Dean continued to sit silently beside the lamp, his rifle across his knees, his hard-featured face tense with thought. Steve Bonner's warning troubled him a little, but he believed he was beginning to see a way to turn to his own profit Andy Rawson's scheme to trap him. An old, old phrase came into his mind, and he mumbled it softly, "Dead men tell no tales." As he pondered it his harsh lips twisted into a grim smile. "Dead men tell no tales," he mumbled again. "If they could—huh!—I'd have been swung from the end of a rope long ago."

Almost as soon as he had learned of Steve Bonner's warning, the idea had occurred to him that Maisie could help him to outwit Rawson. Now he was proceeding to lay even broader plans. He might not be able to carry them out, for there were too many possibilities to consider, but he had a feeling that luck was going to be with him.

Maisie, herself, failed to solve the problem of why he was going to need her, and she soon put it out of her mind. The next morning, when he announced that he was going to ride up the valley to get a third horse to add to her own and his, she voiced her curiosity.

"Never mind about asking me any questions now," he said. "It would take too long to explain. You'll find out soon enough."

It was eleven o'clock that night when Maisie returned home from Gulchtown —the hour they had agreed upon. She had come alone this time. Steve had not appeared at the Palace, and she had made up her mind that Andy Rawson was probably keeping him busy. No light shone from the cabin, a fact that puzzled her a little until she found her father waiting in the horse shed, where his own black horse and a white-faced bay he had brought from somewhere up the valley was already saddled and bridled.

"I've been away in the hills ever since sundown," he announced. "And I guess I've put over one trick on Raw-

son, anyhow. I figured he'd set a watch on me along some time after dark. Now it looks like that's just what he tried to do, for I found horse tracks round the house when I got back. Could see 'em plain enough with the moon shining so bright. He's had men here —maybe he was here himself. Finding me gone must have been an unpleasant surprise for 'em."

Maisie was much less confident than her father seemed to be. "They may come back," she suggested timorously, "or perhaps they haven't gone away at all. They may be watching from close by somewhere. You're taking awful chances, dad. You've got me scared."

With a shrug of his shoulders Dean turned away from her and mounted his black horse. He had the bay on a lead rope. As he rode away from the shed with the bay in tow and Maisie riding beside him, he seemed to have no fear of being spied upon.

"They've cleaned out," he declared confidently. "When they found I wasn't here, they just naturally made up their minds they'd come too late. They're prob'ly out now trying to pick up my trail somewheres else. I'm ready to bet they won't find it—not till too late to do 'em any good, anyhow."

She noticed that his rifle was hanging from his saddle and that there was a revolver in a holster at his hip. The sight of these weapons added to her fears. The fact that he had come so heavily armed made her realize more clearly than ever that this night was full of dreadful possibilities.

"We're headed for the Bear Cañon Trail," he informed her after they had passed through a stretch of black woods and were on the bare slopes beyond. "I guess we can breathe easy now. If any of Rawson's men had been tagging after us, they'd have had to stick pretty close to our heels in those woods to make sure of not losing us, and we'd have heard 'em. That don't mean we may not get sight of 'em later. I dunno just how much of a tip Rawson got. Maybe he's been put wise to some of the rest of my crowd. But we'll know soon enough."

The trail led higher and higher into the hills. It grew rougher and more precipitous. Before long Bear Cañon lay below them, a black, narrow abyss which the moonlight failed to penetrate. It was no longer possible to ride together. With steep ramparts rising close to one side and a yawning gulf on the other, there was room for only one horse at a time. They rode cautiously and in silence, their minds intent on watching the horses thread the difficult way. Gradually the pass grew wider. They crossed over the shoulder of a hill and came out on a broad stretch of table-land. Here and there were patches of heavy timber. At last they found themselves looking down into a huge bowl—several square miles of woodland, hemmed in by walls which a good climber might scale but which were too precipitous for horses.

"Down there," Dean explained with a wave of his hand at the deep inclosure, "is where we've got the stuff cached. A pile of gold that would make your eyes bulge, Maisie. It means an easy life for both of us. I'll keep out of trouble then and let the crooked jobs alone. A man can afford to go straight, after he's got plenty of kale in the bank."

Maisie's fears were gradually slipping away. She was almost convinced that either Steve had been mistaken about Andy Rawson's plans or that her sly old father had succeeded in outwitting the sheriff. The lure of gold was beginning to appeal to her now; perhaps some of old Dean's wild, lawless blood was stirring in her veins.

"If you can only get the stuff stowed away safe, dad, and keep clear of the law we'll go a thousand miles from here," she muttered with a sigh, "some

place where folks won't be able to hold your past up against you."

Dean was staring off over the wild, moonlit hills. There was no sound, not even a wind, no sign of life or danger. They were riding on close to the rim of the walled valley, and Maisie knew there must be a passage to it somewhere. "I'll get the stuff stowed away safe enough," he assured her. "You don't have to do no worrying about that."

"Is it too heavy to carry on your saddle?" she asked. "Is that why you brought that other horse?"

"I dunno as that was the idea exactly —no," he answered. "Me and the boys brought the whole business up here on our saddles easy enough. I'd figured out another reason why I might need that horse."

"Another reason, dad? You've got me guessing."

"All right. Keep on guessing. The less you know the less you'll have to worry about."

As if he were still suspicious of danger, Dean's eyes were searching the country around them continually. Now and then he turned in his saddle and looked back.

"I'm going to ride on alone down to the cache where the boys are waiting," he announced presently. "You're going to stay here and wait for me." He pointed to a thick growth of pines near by. "You ride over to those trees, and go in far enough so's nobody'll see you. Stay there till I come back, even if you have to wait till daylight. I'm going to leave the lead horse with you."

He tossed the lead rope to her and rode on. For a few moments she remained at the spot where he had left her, and watched him until he disappeared. Then, as she turned toward the pines, she saw, far off on the sky line of the shoulder of the hill they had crossed, a moving speck, a solitary horseman coming from the cañon trail. She was sure it wasn't Andy Rawson. He wouldn't be coming alone. Yet it was with a sense of danger that she hurried into the cover of the woods.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAP.

THE brains of the outfit that had stolen the Aladdin Smelters' gold shipment, was centered in Dallas Dean. His hold on the four other members of the gang, mere pikers who, until he showed them the way to wealth, had been content with small pickings, was almost hypnotic. Among such men his long record as a desperado had made him something of a hero, and his assumption of leadership had not been questioned. It was Dean who had decided it wouldn't be safe to try to get away with the heavy, cumbersome plunder while the whole country was out on the hunt. They would have to scatter and wait until the alarm had died down. The loot would have to remain cached for a week. They could not have found a lonelier or more secluded spot for a hiding place than this walled valley.

The hour agreed upon for meeting and dividing the treasure had now arrived, and Dean, though he had reason for believing that Andy Rawson was as hard on the hunt as ever, was tired of waiting for safer conditions. His men, like himself, were in desperate straits for money and eager to get away to other parts of the country, where they would not be under the constant shadow of suspicion. Rawson might keep up the hunt for weeks or months. Dean had decided the time had come to take chances. Some of his men might be rounded up by the vigilant sheriff after the divvy, but he had confidence in his own ability to play safe. He didn't intend to do any worrying about the others. This was going to be his last crooked job, and he was thinking only about himself—himself and Maisie.

The only entrance to the valley where the cache had been made was a deep gap with a cliff of a hill on one side and a steep slide of broken rock running down from a high moraine on the other. Dean rode through this pass slowly and cautiously. He did not believe there was danger, but Maisie's report of what Steve Bonner had said made him a little more wary than he would have been otherwise in this remote place. The fact that evidently some of Rawson's men had been at his cabin had convinced him that the sheriff did not know where the gold was cached. All Rawson knew, apparently, was that on this night Dean was going somewhere to meet the rest of the gang. The pass was evidently deserted. He came through confidently into the big bowl. He rode on for perhaps two miles. The gently rolling ground was partly timbered, and he was cautious enough to avoid crossing clear spaces where he might have been conspicuous to observers. He kept within the shadows of the trees until, after passing a wide patch of water, silvered by the moon, he drew near to a cleft in one of the precipitous walls that hemmed the valley.

Suddenly from this cleft an indistinct figure appeared before him. Dean identified it after a moment as "Pueblo" Crombie, one of the four men he had expected to find.

"We seen you when you was coming out o' the pass," said Pueblo. "With the moon out so bright a feller shows up a powerful long ways off. We'd figured that maybe Jim Garner would be coming along with you."

"Garner!" said Dean. "You mean to say he's not here?"

"Not yet. Billy Coran and 'Blackie' Kershaw are waiting in here on the rocks. Last we seen of Jim he was filling up on white mule, or maybe he foundered before he could get here. If he don't come he ain't in on the divvy —that's all. He'll have only himself to blame."

Dean, frowning, pondered for a moment Garner's failure to arrive; then seemed to dismiss the problem from his mind. "Forget him, Pueblo," he said sullenly as he swung himself out of his saddle. Leading his horse, he followed Crombie into the cleft of the rocks. After a moment Billy Coran, a flat-faced little man with a babylike stare, and Blackie Kershaw, tall, dark, and gloomy, looking as if he might have Indian blood in his veins, came forward to meet him. Their horses and Crombie's were standing near by in the shadow of the cliff.

"How'd things go, Billy?" asked Dean, turning to Coran.

Coran shrugged his shoulders. "I've had enough of it," he grumbled. "Believe me, I've been getting all the worst of the deal. While you fellers have been living easy I've had nothing but a horse to talk to."

Crombie laughed. He and the rest of the gang had decided they could trust Billy Coran to guard the cache during their week of absence. They had good reason for believing the gold would be safe with him. For one thing, they had rolled over the hole in the rocks where the treasure lay a huge boulder which was too heavy for one man or even two men to even budge. If by a bare possibility he had hit on some way of prying it loose, he would have found his labor futile, for the load of loot was too heavy for his horse to carry. He could have got away with scarcely more than his own share. There was still another reason for having confidence in him. As Crombie had expressed it, Billy Coran was a bird who didn't have brains enough to try any tricks. Of course, they could have left the cache unwatched, but that might have resulted in trouble. These men had small faith in one another. Two or three of them might have com-

bined against the others and have contrived to make off with the entire plunder.

"Billy's one honest little hombre," Crombie said with a grin. "The rock's still there, just like we left it."

"And without Garner it'll be just about all the four of us can do to get it off," Dean grumbled. "What's happened to the cuss, anyhow? I sure thought he had brains enough to keep the hooch from getting him at a time like this."

Apparently Crombie's sharp little eyes had made a discovery. He was staring off in the direction of the pass. "Jim's coming now," he announced. "I had a hunch he'd show up all right. He's no derned fool."

There could be no doubt it was Garner who was coming through the valley. The peculiar, one-sided way the long-limbed figure was clinging to the saddle would have been almost proof enough, but the characteristic forward tilt of the huge black hat and the pronounced stoop in the heavy shoulders of the rider were convincing. He was coming fast, but his little horse was running clumsily, as though tired out. For two or three minutes the four men stood silently watching him until he drew close.

"The boys had about given you up, Jim," said Dean. "They've been figuring you must have got into trouble somehow."

As he pulled up his horse Garner pushed his hat back and swept the perspiration from his forehead with the back of his hand. "That's just what I did get into," he admitted. "And I'm in it yet. So's the whole bunch of us. Rawson's been trailing me."

Dean's heavy eyebrows came together in a savage frown. "Well, tell us and be quick about it," he cried sharply. "You mean to say you've been fool enough to let him trail you here?"

"Gee, Dallas! I couldn't help it," Garner protested, looking sheepish. "I didn't get wise to the fact that he and his bunch were after me till I got into the cañon. Then I tried to lose 'em by pushing on fast. I thought I had lost 'em till I got to the pass leading in here. Then I looked round and got sight of 'em as they were coming over the shoulder of the big hill, two or three miles back."

"And you can bet your shirt they'd got sight of you, too, you blithering idiot!" roared Blackie Kershaw. "They could pick you out at that distance on a night like this, easy. If you had as much brains as a calf, you wouldn't have let 'em track you here. Now look what you've done. You've got us trapped."

Stricken with panic, Pueblo Crombie started to run back into the cleft for his horse, but Dean stopped him. "You losing your head, too, Pueblo?" he said. "S'pose you just wait till we figure this thing out. It's too late to make a getaway. We might get to the pass several minutes ahead of 'em, but we couldn't get out of it without being sighted by 'em, and with the moon up we'd have small chance of giving 'em the slip."

"They've got no case against us," Blackie Kershaw reminded him. "If they don't get us with the stuff, they've got nothing but suspicion. And that ain't going to be much help to 'em."

Dean glanced dubiously at the cache. "By now they're wise to the fact that we've got the stuff stowed away in this valley somewheres," he decided. "And if they hunt round hard enough they'll be able to follow the tracks our horses have left right to this spot. Coran's been camping here for a week. Look at his food cans scattered all around. They'll find plenty of signs that this is the right place. That rock we've got planted over the stuff don't look natural. It's left its track all the way from where we dragged it. If Andy Rawson's as

cute as I take him to be he'll know what's under it. We've gotta stow that stuff somewheres else."

His four companions looked doubtful. Crombie stared about for another near-by hiding place for the cumbersome plunder and seemed to discover none that satisfied him. In despair he turned to Dean. "We haven't got the time, Dallas," he urged. "That stuff's heavy. Before we could lift that rock off and get all of them bars to a better spot, we'd find Rawson's bunch with the drop on us."

Dean was thinking rapidly. Many experiences with desperate situations had made him a man of quick and shrewd decisions in pressing emergencies. "If we've got no time to move the stuff then we've got to make the time, that's all," he declared. "We've gotta hold Rawson and his bunch off. If we don't the game is up. He'll find it slow work coming down the shoulder of the hill. The trail's bad up there. There's plenty of time to get down to the pass ahead of him, and two or three of us, shooting from behind rocks on the moraine, oughta be able to hold his crowd off all night. Quick, now! We gotta get that boulder off."

The five men ran to the cache, and their united efforts rolled the big rock off the hole it had concealed. Dean, his dark eyes flashing, his hard-featured face full of savage determination, turned to Crombie with a look that showed he was not in a mood to have his word questioned. Crombie had always been afraid of Dean, and he quailed before him now.

"You and Kershaw and Garner jump on your horses and beat it for the pass," Dean ordered. "Hide yourselves away down there and pump lead at that bunch till the place gets too hot for 'em. If you can hold 'em off even half an hour Coran and me'll have the stuff stowed where it'll be safe. Then we'll come down and join you. If Rawson don't quit we'll fight till we can make our get-away."

Crombie and Kershaw ran for their horses, but Garner stood hesitating "They've got us trapped, Dallas," he argued. "No matter how long we might hold 'em off we couldn't get out —not with our horses anyhow, and we'd be rounded up in short order if we tried a get-away without horses. What's the use of putting up a fight and getting in worse, when we're licked already?"

With a sneer of contempt Dean turned away from him, calling out to Crombie and Kershaw, "Keep your eyes on this hombre, you fellers. He's yaller through and through. Don't let him——"

Abruptly and apparently with a sudden change of thought, he fell silent. "Take Billy Coran with you," he decided after a moment. "He'll put up a better fight than this poor bird. Leave Jim here to help me hide the stuff."

The three men chosen to hold the pass rode quickly away, while Dean stood looking about for a place to hide the gold. For a moment he was puzzled. The steep walls behind and on either side of him offered no hole or fissure that satisfied him. The ground at his feet was merely a thin layer of earth over solid rock. Even if he could have found a spot near by, where a hole could be dug deep enough for his purpose, he was without a spade. For a few seconds a patch of thick timber not more than a hundred yards away suggested an answer to his problem, for he might find enough undergrowth there to make a safe cache. But no farther off lay the shining patch of water he had passed on his way to the cleft, and as his gaze fastened on it now, inspiration came to him.

"We're going to drop the stuff in the pond, Jim," he announced.

"Huh?" Garner grunted. "That pond's deep. I can tell from the look of it."

"Never mind, Jim. That's where we're going to drop the stuff all the same."

Garner followed Dean meekly to the cache where the rock had been rolled away and helped him to lift out from the hole five bundles of gold bars wrapped in strips of canvas. The bars had been shipped from the smelter in boxes, which, too cumbersome to be carried away by the bandits on their saddles, had been broken open. The bars had been rolled up into the five canvas bundles—one hundred and thirty-four pounds to a man, which they had found a good deal of a load on their flight through the rough mountain passes. These bundles were now quickly packed on the two horses, who were then led to the pond. At the edge of the water the gold was dumped to the ground. Here Dean removed a little of the stout twine that had been wrapped around the bars. Crouching low he peered down into the water. It was as black as ink. Below the surface he could see nothing.

"Pretty deep, Jim," he muttered. "Looks like this is just a shelf of rock we're standing on. No shallow edges round here. The ground falls away abrupt."

Deftly he tied a stone to the twine he had removed, and plumbed the depth. "Something like fifteen feet," he calculated roughly as the stone found bottom. A few steps farther on he sounded again, and the stone sank even deeper. He was afraid to devote more time to soundings, and he returned briskly to the fifteen-foot depth determined to carry out his plan at that point.

"There's more'n six hundred pounds of gold," Garner reminded him. "A dozen men couldn't pull that weight up from fifteen foot of water. There's only five of us. And s'pose one or two of the fellers that's gone down to the pass gets shot. S'pose——"

His voice broke off, and he turned a startled look at Dean. The sound of guns had come crashing through the moonlit silence of the valley. "Rawson's come!" he exclaimed.

Dean stood rigid for a moment, listening. The sound of firing continued. "Yeah, Jim," he mumbled abstractedly as if more to himself than to his companion. "You're right. Maybe one or two of 'em won't come back. Maybe none of 'em'll come back. I'm going to sink that gold so's one man can pull it up, Jim."

Dropping to his knees, he proceeded to untie each bundle of bars. As he pulled them out from their canvas coverings they glistened in the moonlight. It was a sight that seemed to fascinate Garner. He stood staring at the great heap of pure gold with his mouth hanging open. Hundreds of feet of powerful twine were removed from the bundles. Dean tied the various lengths of it together. At the same time his gaze wandered over the pond.

"Jim, there's a floating tree stump over there," he said presently, as he pointed along the shore. "Go down there and push it up this way. I've gotta have it. It ain't too far out from land to reach if you stretch yourself a bit."

Dean was now stringing the heavy bars together eight or ten feet apart on the twine. He had calculated that one man would probably be able to pull up not more than two bars at a time from fifteen feet of water. This was a one-man job he was preparing for. The sound of the guns had set him to thinking deeply. It might have to be a one-man job.

There might be only one man left.

Garner was finding difficulty in piloting the big, clumsy stump along the shore. By the time he arrived with it Dean had completed the work of stringing the bars together. After fastening the last bar he had left at least twenty feet of free cord.

"Just listen to all that shooting," Gar-

ner cried. "The boys must be putting up an awful fight."

His mind was so intent on the sounds from the direction of the pass that he paid little attention to what Dean was doing. The latter did not speak; did not look up from his work. He was fastening the free end of the twine securely to the floating stump. When he had done this he proceeded to push the bars of gold one by one into the water. It did not require much effort. The tug of the bars, already overboard, was almost strong enough to pull the rest after them. Before long the last bar had gone to the bottom, and he surveyed the result of his work with a look of satisfaction. He felt a little proud of the ingenuity that had succeeded in sinking such a huge weight of treasure in such a way that the strength of one man could retrieve it all. The strength of one man! He turned away from the water and stared coldly at Jim Garner. Only he and Jim knew what the stump meant—that it marked the gold cache. As Jim had suggested, the men who had gone to hold the pass might never return.

"Listen!" said Jim. "Can you hear anything?"

There was no longer any sound from the pass. "Either Rawson's quit, or our boys have been driven out," Dean muttered, "or else——"

He came to a significant pause and Garner understood what it meant. The two men, leading their horses, were walking away from the water now. The tall timber was shadowing them. The tips of pines and spruce were silhouetted clearly against the bright sky.

"If they don't come back, Dallas, there's only you and me for the divvy," said Garner.

Dean did not speak. If a few more moments passed and brought neither the sound of guns nor the sight of the men returning he would be convinced that they had met with disaster.

"It looks like something had happened to the boys," Garner said solemnly after those few moments had gone by.

Even now Dean said nothing. Suddenly Garner seemed to feel something ominous in his companion's steady silence. He shot a quick glance at Dean's face, and what he saw there was not reassuring.

"Dallas, you said you was going to sink that gold so's one man could pull it up," he said. "What didja mean by that? Even if the boys don't come back there's two of us, ain't they?"

Dean paid no attention to the question. In deep abstraction he was staring through the valley. Nobody had emerged from the pass and there was no more sound of firing. Presently his thoughts strayed far away from this valley and into the future. This was going to be his last job. He was thinking of Maisie. He was going to make Maisie rich—even richer than he had planned.

"Yeah, there's two of us, Jim," he said at last. "And it looks like the boys wasn't coming back. If they don't I guess I can pull up that gold alone."

Garner gave a start. "Huh? Alone!"

"Sure—alone. You know too much. Dead men don't tell no tales, Jim."

With a frightened gasp Garner drew back. Dean's revolver was pointing at him. "Dallas!" he cried. "You're not—not going to murder me—to shoot me down like a dog without a chance?"

"You're not much better than a dog, Jim, anyhow," Dean said coolly. "I've gotta be sneaking outa here pretty quick, and I couldn't trust you—never. You'd be scheming how to trick me outa that gold."

Garner's rifle was strapped to his saddle. So slowly that the movement was almost imperceptible his right hand was slipping toward the six-shooter in his belt. His fingers had just reached the muzzle of the gun when Dean fired.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FUGITIVE FROM THE PASS.

A FEW minutes later Dean, turning coolly away from Jim Garner's lifeless body, stopped abruptly with a sudden nervous tension. Far down the valley he had caught sight of a man riding toward him furiously, from the direction of the pass. With a startled oath he swung round to where Garner was lying. The body, though in the shadow of the timber, was so near the course the rider would be sure to follow, that it would scarcely escape observation. Dean hesitated. He might have barely enough time to drag his victim in among the trees, but he couldn't be sure he would not be discovered in the act. After a few seconds of indecision he mounted his horse, intending to meet the rider and hoping to hold the man's attention from the shadowed spot that held the secret of his crime. Even Garner's horse, which now stood quivering and with frightened eyes on his dead master, might not be noticed if Dean could turn the rider to the other side of the clearing.

Fear was almost an unknown emotion to Dallas Dean. He was a cold-blooded old-timer who had been through so many situations as desperate as this one seemed to be, that he found scarcely a thrill in it. Yet it was with intense curiosity that he kept his eyes steadily fastened on the man who was coming toward him at such mad speed. Who was he? he asked himself. Was he Crombie, or Billy Coran, or Kershaw? And what news was he bringing? Bad news undoubtedly.

"Kershaw!" he muttered the next moment. He pulled up his horse and waited, for the distance between them had now lessened to a few hundred feet.

Blackie Kershaw had lost his hat and, as he drew near the moonlight disclosed an ugly scar across his forehead.

"Well?" Dean called out impatiently. "What's the bad word?"

Blackie raised his hands in a hopeless gesture. "We got licked, that's all," he answered sullenly. "Dern your old hide, you picked an easy job for yourself. You mighta known we three couldn't hold out against that bunch."

"Where's Coran and Crombie?"

Blackie swept the back of a hand across his trickling scar and frowned savagely. "Where d'yuh think they are? Picking daisies? They're where I'd be, if Rawson's bullet had come half an inch closer instead of just creasing me."

Dean shrugged his shoulders. So Billy Coran and Pueblo had been killed. It wasn't any worse news than he had expected, however. Anxiously he fastened his eyes on the distant pass, but there was no sign of pursuit. "How'd it happen, Blackie? You three oughta have been able to play safe in a place like that."

"Some of Rawson's men worked their way round to the other side of the moraine." Blackie explained. "They came up over the top and got us from the rear. I managed to slide down to where I'd left my horse, and got away without 'em seeing me. They must have figured there was only two of us or they'd have been up here before now. They'll be coming along pretty soon anyhow looking for the cache."

"More likely they figure a bunch of us is waiting for 'em under cover in here somewheres and they're playing cautious," Dean decided. "They won't come so fast that we won't have plenty of time to beat it outa here over the walls."

"A derned poor chance of making a clean get-away we'll have without our horses," Blackie said. "We can choose a place to hide all right, but they'll prob'ly pick us up by daylight."

Dean had little doubt of being able to make his own get-away, and he wasn't

worrying about what might happen to Blackie. Almost as soon as he had learned of Steve Bonner's warning, he had foreseen the danger of being trapped in this valley by Rawson's posse. He had suspected even then that the sheriff, after being tricked by Dean, himself, might manage to pick up the trail of some fool like Garner. So, being old enough and wise enough to take every possible precaution, he had brought Maisie along with an extra horse. Maisie was clever. If she should find her hiding place threatened or his way to it cut off, she would contrive to meet him somewhere else.

From the corner of an eye Dean studied Kershaw suspiciously. It was queer, he mused, that he hadn't asked what had become of Garner. Already they had passed the spot where the body lay, and he wasn't sure whether Kershaw's attention had been attracted to it. They rode on to the corner of the valley that lay farthest from the pass. There they would leave their horses and scale the walls.

"I heard a shot over here somewheres when I was riding up from the pass," Kershaw said presently. "What happened?"

For a moment Dean hesitated before answering. "I had a row with Garner," he declared. "He pulled his gun on me, and I shot him."

Kershaw turned a long, accusing stare on his companion. "I thought that shot was for Garner soon as I heard it," he said softly. "Took you a mighty long time to say anything about it, eh, Dallas?"

"I'd pretty near forgot about him, Blackie," said Dean. "There's plenty on my mind without wasting thoughts on a fool like Garner. He deserved what he got. If it hadn't been for him we wouldn't be in this fix, and Coran and Crombie would be alive."

"Where'd you stow the stuff, Dallas?" Blackie's manner was full of suspicion.

"In the woods. It's safe enough. The undergrowth hides it."

Kershaw asked no more questions. He knew perhaps that they would be futile. He hadn't been fooled. Dean could sense the fact that he knew why Garner had been killed. Kershaw, knowing that, must realize his own life was in danger—that he couldn't trust Dean for an instant. Kershaw had become a menace. He was probably watching for a chance to shoot to save himself. Even if he didn't shoot he might, if caught by the posse, betray Dean to the sheriff. So Dean reasoned, and he decided it would be better to put the man out of the way—to silence his tongue forever, as he had silenced Garner's. Kershaw would be a harder man to get than Garner had been, for he was now on his guard, and Dean knew he had a reputation for being very quick on the draw.

Blackie, keeping the tail of an eye on his companion, was looking back at the pass. "They're coming," he announced. Dean, looking back himself now, could see moving specks at the other end of the valley. He and Blackie, already in the shadow of the walls, swung out of their saddles.

"We might hide the horses in the woods somewheres," Blackie suggested.

"No use," answered Dean. "That bunch will be searching through the timber everywheres." He began to climb the steep rocks, but his eyes did not leave his companion for an instant.

Kershaw stood hesitating. He waited till Dean was fully twenty feet above him, before starting to follow. Then he came on slowly. Dean got to the top, and a few feet from the brink concealed himself behind a boulder. Gun in hand, he waited there for Blackie's head to appear. And presently something showed above the wall. It was a hat. It rose a little higher, and Dean fired. Blackie's hat and head dropped out of sight.

Cautiously Dean slipped out from behind the boulder. He was almost sure he had got his man. He moved slowly to the top of the wall and looked over. A shot greeted him, but the bullet missed its mark. With an oath he drew back, cursing himself for a bungler. Somewhere below was Kershaw, unhurt probably, waiting a chance to get him. Dean, realizing he had no time to waste, gave up the job as hopeless and hastened away to the patch of timber where he had left Maisie.

Maisie was still there. She had seen Jim Garner pass, and later the sheriff and his posse had gone by so close to her hiding place that she had feared the two horses, stirring restlessly, would betray her. Then she had heard the guns in the pass. Ever since that alarming sound had come to her ears she had been in a state of nerve-racking suspense. She gave a gasp of relief as she discovered Dean drawing near. The savage expression of the old desperado's face softened at the sight of her. There was even the suggestion of a smile on his hard, bearded lips.

"Guess you musta thought they got me, eh, Maisie?" he said. The words came in a hoarse whisper, for voices are apt to carry far in the silent hills.

"The shooting had me scared plumb stiff," she admitted, "and I'm scared yet. Are they after you—that crowd of Rawson's?"

Dean tried to reassure her. "Don't you do no worrying, little girl. Nary one of 'em got even a look at me. If we can get outa here quick enough, Rawson'll never be able to pin anything on me, no matter how hard he tries."

He had mounted the lead horse as he was speaking, and now, followed by Maisie, he rode cautiously out from the patch of timber. But he avoided the trail that led over the shoulder of the big hill and on through Bear Cañon.

"We've gotta go back another way," he explained. "The cañon trail ain't safe for us. Some of Rawson's posse are liable to be keeping watch on it. We gotta skirt round the hills for a good ten miles further than the way we came. And we better ride fast for a spell. We ain't any too safe yet."

Intent on making the best speed possible through the rough country they were following, they scarcely spoke until they had left the walled valley several miles behind them. At last Maisie, still ignorant of everything that had happened while she was waiting in the timber, began to ask questions. Dean lied to her skillfully. He declared that Garner, as well as Coran and Crombie, had been killed by the posse in the pass. The names of these three men were familiar to her, and she had known Garner by sight. Dean saw her shudder as he told of their fate.

"There were only four of you? You're the only one who came through alive?" she asked with a quiver of fear in her voice.

"There was one more," he admitted. "A smooth hombre named Blackie Kershaw. I dunno what's become of him. Maybe he's managed to give Rawson the slip. If he's done that—well, Blackie don't know where the gold's cached. Neither does Rawson. I'm the only man alive that knows that. So I don't hafta be afraid the stuff won't be there waiting for me when I'm ready to go for it."

The sun, peeping up over the hilltops, found them far from home, and it was not until two or three hours later that they caught sight of their cabin.

"There's somebody there!" Maisie gasped out as they drew nearer.

Her father's sharp, restless eyes had already discovered a man mounted on a gray horse, waiting patiently in front of the cabin door. "I've seen that horse before," he muttered. "And the man —it's Bonner!"

With Maisie beside him, Dean rode on confidently. He was quite sure

there was nothing to fear from this deputy of Rawson's. "What you doing here, Bonner?" he demanded a moment later.

Steve didn't even look at Maisie. His boyish face was very serious. "Andy Rawson sent me to find out whether you was home, Dean," he answered. "He figures he's pretty near got a case against you. He wants to know if you was away between midnight and sunup. And it looks like you was. I've been waiting here quite a while."

"Steve!" cried Maisie reproachfully. "And you were a friend of ours! I thought you were going to stand by us."

"I made a derned fool of myself once," Steve said bitterly, "but I can't do it again. Things have got too serious. I was in that fight in the pass last night, and one of my pals got a bullet in his leg. We picked up three dead men when that rumpus was over—Crombie and Coran and Garner." For a moment he paused, and looked hard at Dean. "And I reckon it wasn't our crowd that killed Jim Garner. I can't be double crossing Rawson after things like that have happened. I'm one of his men, and I've got my duty to do."

As Steve started slowly away, Dean, with a sudden feeling of hopelessness, rode on to the horse shed.

CHAPTER V.

BLACKIE GUARDS THE LOOT.

THE sun had gone down, and the daylight was fading out. Dean, who, after watering and feeding his horse on his return that morning, had gone to bed exhausted by his wild adventures of the night, awakened from troubled sleep. He was a picture of dejection, and he was feeling not a bit more cheerful than he looked. Luck seemed to have set against him hard. As he lay blinking sleepily at the rafters, his thoughts turned to Steve Bonner. So Bonner had decided to be on the level with Rawson after all, he mused. By now the sheriff must know that he had come trailing home on a tired horse long after sunrise. Rawson had figured already that he almost had a case against him, according to Bonner. Things seemed to be closing in disastrously. Perhaps the posse had found his horse in the walled valley. Even if they could prove it was his horse that fact might not be enough to convict him, for he could have been riding another horse. Yet it would be one more link in the chain of evidence. Coupled with Bonner's report it would look bad.

It was neither Bonner nor Rawson that troubled him most. He was not at all sure the sheriff would be able to build a convincing case against him. It was not until he began to brood about Blackie Kershaw that his spirits sank to their deepest level of dejection. He was pretty sure Blackie was free, for he reasoned that, if he had been caught, Bonner would have mentioned the fact. With Blackie loose—Dean groaned at the prospect. Kershaw would keep watch over the walled valley like a hawk, and would wait days, weeks, months if necessary, for Dean to come back for the gold. Face to face with Blackie, Dean would have no reason to be afraid of him—but Blackie wouldn't show himself. He would be hiding behind some rock or tree, and Dean wouldn't know he was there, until a shot announced the fact. Then it would be too late.

"I gotta get the cuss, that's all there is to it," Dean mused. "He'll never find that cache, but so long as he's alive he'll be sure to keep me from getting to it."

Presently he became conscious of the fact that there was a dead silence, and he called out for Maisie. There was no reply—not a sound.

"I guess she's gone," he decided. "must be somewheres around eight

o'clock. Pretty near time for her to show up at the hall."

Here was another turn of thought that depressed him. He had hoped that Maisie would never have to go back to sing for the crowd at the Palace again. With desperate determination getting hold of him, he sprang from the bed. He was not beaten yet. He was the only living man who knew where six hundred and seventy pounds of gold was cached. That weight of gold was worth one hundred and sixty-seven thousand dollars. Enough to make a fine lady of Maisie! Somehow he would contrive to outwit Kershaw.

He was less intent now on getting possession of the gold than on the importance of informing himself about Kershaw. The gold could wait. It wouldn't be safe to get it until he was ready to disappear to some distant place, where he could turn the bullion into money without inviting arrest. Even the job of finding out about Kershaw could wait, perhaps; yet Dean was too curious, too anxious and restless, to remain idle merely marking time.

Not long after dark he was out once more on the Bear Cañon Trail, his rifle on his saddle and his six-shooter in his belt. He rode rapidly until he came to the pass leading into the walled valley. Though the sky was full of stars, the moon had not risen yet, and he was in the deep shadow of the moraine. It would have taken sharp eyes to discover him from a distance; on the soft earth his horse, moving slowly, was making scarcely a sound. As the pass widened into the little valley, it occurred to him that, so long as he succeeded in keeping secret the location of the bullion, he might have little to fear from Kershaw. Until he had trailed Dean to the cache, Blackie would surely be foolish to kill him unless to save his own life.

It was too late to propose peace and to offer to share the bullion fifty-fifty. Blackie, with the fate of Jim Garner and his own narrow escape fastened vividly in his memory, wouldn't dare to take the risk. Dean quickly dismissed the idea from his mind. It would be much better, he reasoned, to depend on the chance of picking Blackie off with a bullet than to present him with more than eighty thousand dollars—and then perhaps to have Blackie shoot him in the back.

As he rode cautiously on through the valley, picking his way through the shadows of the timber and carefully avoiding any clearing, he thought that perhaps Blackie had gone away to lay in a stock of food. Up at the cleft where the first cache had been made, some of Billy Coran's supplies remained —but not enough to last more than a day or two. Blackie might be figuring on a long siege.

So far there was no sign of him. Billy Coran had made himself a bed in the cleft where his supplies were out of pine boughs. It seemed a fair conjecture that Kershaw had made camp in the same spot. Presently Dean left his horse in the timber and walked on toward the cleft, carrying his rifle. There was a dead silence. No light shone from the cleft. His eyes sought hard for the smoke of a fire and failed to find it. Keeping close to the edge of the timber, he drew slowly nearer until he came to the end of the trees. From this point he continued in the shadow of the precipitous hillside.

As he was cautiously making his way around a point of rock he stopped abruptly, with every nerve alert. Not more than fifty feet ahead of him were two horses standing together close to the wall. Near by lay their saddles and bridles. He was able to identify one of the animals beyond a doubt as his own black, while the other looked very much like Kershaw's little red roan.

It was plain now that Kershaw must have succeeded in concealing the two horses so well that they had escaped

discovery by the sheriff and his posse. And it was equally plain that Kershaw himself was not far off. Even at this moment very likely he was watching from the timber or from some hiding place in the rocks.

Dean began to retrace his steps. Though he could neither see Blackie nor hear him, he had an uncanny feeling that the man's eyes were following him steadily. Only a little way off, standing alone, a great silver spruce rose high against the sky. It was glorious in the starlight. The sheen of its plumes was as though it were winter and the frost were over it. The tree cast a long shadow. There was something curious about that shadow. Though there was no wind and the needles of the spruce were motionless, a small corner of the shadow seemed to move.

"Kershaw!" whispered Dean, drawing closer to the wall.

For a moment he was tempted to try a shot at the moving spot, but it was too poor a mark. His own position was too much exposed. He couldn't see Kershaw nor any living thing—only a moving shadow. Yet he knew instinctively that Kershaw was there. To try to "get" him under these circumstances would have been fatal, in all probability, not to Blackie but to Dean.

Before long Dean had crept too far along the shadow of the wall to see the movement under the spruce. Soon he was at the timber, and, picking his way slowly and silently through the edge of it, he came presently to his horse. In possession now of the information he had been seeking and content to leave his own black horse with Kershaw—for a time at least—he set off for the home trail.

The moon came up as he left the valley, and with a lighted way before him, he rode fast. The night was more than half over when he arrived at his cabin. In the soft earth in front of his home he noticed the fresh, clearly marked prints of horses' hoofs. They troubled him. Two horses had been there evidently a very short time ago. One might have been Maisie's, but he couldn't account for the other. Frowning he rode on to the shed. Maisie's horse was there, as he had expected. After bedding both animals he went into the cabin, where he found his daughter waiting for him.

"Somebody come here with you?" he demanded.

"Yes," she admitted, "Steve."

"Bonner! You let that rat ride home with you again after he'd turned against me? You wanta help him get me dead to rights? That's what he's trying to do."

Maisie flushed angrily. "Well, what do you think I'm trying to do?" she cried. "I hope you don't think I'm so dumb that I don't know how to handle a feller like Steve Bonner."

"Huh? Then you ought've begun sooner with him if you was trying to play him for a sucker. Wasn't he here spying on us when we got back from up in the hills? And didn't he go then and tip Rawson off?"

"If you'd waited another minute instead of leaving us and going over to the shed you'd know different," said Maisie.

"Know different? Whatcher mean?"

"That was the minute when I put something over on Steve, dad."

Dean was deeply puzzled. "You put something over on him?"

"Sure thing. I turned on the tear valves. Seeing me cry was too much for Steve. He changed his mind about tipping Rawson off. You just leave Steve to me. I'll teach that hombre how to behave."

For fully half a minute he stood staring at his daughter without saying a word. The ways of women were beyond his comprehension. His own method of silencing Steve Bonner

would have been with a bullet at the risk of being sent to the gallows. Maisie had turned the trick with only tears. He had had to fight his way through life with a gun; but this girl of his seemed to have weapons more powerful than that. Somewhere he had heard that the pen is mightier than the sword, and now he was beginning to realize that the powder puff could be mightier than the six-shooter.

CHAPTER VI.

A DANGEROUS GAME.

DEAN was sure, however, that Blackie Kershaw could never be conquered with any such weapons as Maisie used. A gun was the thing to get rid of Blackie's cantankerousness. One little pellet of lead, lodged in the right spot in Blackie's anatomy, would at once solve the problem of how Dean was going to get possession of the stolen bullion.

It was evident that Blackie was going to be a hard man to get. He was part Indian, so Dean had heard, which perhaps explained his craftiness; he could be as sly and elusive as a fox.

"He showed me nothing but his shadder," Dean mused. "And I can't be so dead sure that I seen even that. Now how am I going to pot that cuss, when he won't even show himself?"

Here was a problem that called for patient perseverance, and patience came hard while the vicinity of Gulchtown seemed so full of danger. It was already time, he felt, to be on his way to some place so distant that Rawson would never find him. Now he must spend days, weeks perhaps, stalking Blackie Kershaw. It might prove to be a harder job than hunting a wise old coyote.

Hour after hour he sat in his cabin turning this puzzle over and over in his mind, his rifle lying across his knees, his gloomy, bearded face turned to the door—the door that might be thrown open any moment by some old enemy, or by Andy Rawson. He could think of no sure way of getting his man, and he felt that he ought not to go gunning for him again, until he had formed some definite idea of how the job was going to be done.

Though inspiration failed to come to him, there was at least one consoling thought. Blackie, in his hope of discovering the bullion, didn't want to leave any evidence that might lead to Dean's arrest; he had hidden not only his own horse but both animals. Evidently Blackie was endowed with brains, a fact that was gradually impressing itself upon Dean.

It was early the next afternoon when Dean set off on the man hunt. He had not told Maisie of how Blackie Kershaw was watching the valley. What was the use of adding to her worries? He had merely informed her that he might not return until the next morning, and had skillfully evaded her questions. Though he believed it might take a good part of the night to get Blackie, he intended to begin stalking him long before dark.

Suspicious that either Rawson himself or some of the sheriff's men might spy upon him, he rode warily along the Bear Cañon Trail, pausing now and then to listen and always watchful. When he came at last to the patch of timber where he had left Maisie two nights before he led his horse in among the trees, fastened him with a halter, and made his way cautiously to the rim of the walled valley. He stationed himself at a point that commanded a view of the big bowl below.

For a long time he scanned the valley, searching for a sign of his quarry. He expected to discover at least the smoke of the fire over which it was reasonable to suppose Blackie would be cooking his supper presently—either smoke, the horses, or Blackie himself.

He wanted to make sure of where the man had made his camp. So far he was merely seeking information; he was not hoping to get a shot at Kershaw from this point. Blackie would be too wise to show himself where he might be picked off from the top of the walls. If he appeared at all he would either be out of range, or too far off to offer a good mark for Dean's gun.

Dean devoted most of his attention to the spot where he had discovered the two horses. The animals were not visible now, and neither was Blackie. The sun went down; it began to grow dark. The valley seemed to be deserted. Not even smoke appeared. The stars were out when, deeply puzzled, he returned to his horse.

"It don't seem possible the cuss has quit," he mused. "P'raps he's doing his sleeping by daylight. If he was there and awake a restless crittur like him would have done some moving around, I'd say. And if he hadn't been sticking to one spot I'd prob'ly have got sight of him."

If his quarry had adopted the habits of the owls, Dean would have to hit upon another plan. Dean had counted on discovering Blackie's camping place and then, long after dark, catching him there asleep. He was inclined to believe the valley was as deserted as it had looked. Perhaps Blackie had gone away for supplies. In that case he might return at any moment. It seemed incredible, with a fortune at stake, that he had abandoned his vigil.

For a moment Dean scanned the hillsides around him and gazed sharply along the trail that led to the cañon. Then he swung into the saddle and rode to the pass. Here again he left his horse, after concealing the animal behind a thick growth of aspen. It would be better, he reasoned, to stalk Blackie on foot. Carrying his rifle, he walked through the narrow defile that led into the valley.

He had gone only a short distance when something tripped him. It was a wire, strung across the dark way a foot above the ground. At the same instant a bell clanged loudly.

Dean flattened himself against the wall of the moraine. He understood at once that this bell trap was the ingenious Blackie's device for getting a warning of a night invader of his domain. The bell had sounded from a point close by up on the steep hillside across the way. The pass was as black as a pit. He could see nothing but the shadowy outline of its bleak, uninviting walls.

Silently he crossed to the other side of the defile. Somewhere close above him was the man he was gunning for. There couldn't be a doubt of it. The hillside at this point seemed to offer a foothold; very slowly, fearful that a false step or a slipping stone would betray him, he made his way upward. Presently he came to a broad shelf of rock. It was not so dark here, where the starlight had a better chance to come through.

He knew that very likely a pair of sharp, black eyes had already discovered him, but he was sure Blackie didn't mean to shoot, unless cornered. Blackie was too wise a hombre to thus spoil his only chance of discovering the cache. Dean realized that it was now too late to corner the man here. He must have slipped away as soon as the bell sounded its warning.

Confident of his own safety, he crept along the edge of the shelf feeling for the wire. He found it presently, and after a moment it led him to a big cow bell, so cleverly suspended between two uprights of timber that a slight tug of the wire would set it ringing. A few feet away on a soft, sandy spot, were blankets that looked as if somebody had been sleeping in them. They were still warm. Evidently the sleeper had only just left. Beside these blankets he

made a curious discovery—an alarm clock.

Why had Blackie provided himself with an alarm clock? Dean wondered. After a moment of thought he solved the puzzle to his satisfaction. By daylight the bell trap would be useless, for anybody coming through the pass would discover the wire. So it had been necessary, of course, for Blackie to make sure of waking with the first streaks of dawn. At break of day the alarm clock would go off; he would roll himself out of his blankets, unstring the wire, and resume his watch over the valley.

Of course there were other ways of getting into the valley besides through the pass. Dean might climb down the walls. But it was only through the narrow way along the base of the moraine that he could bring a horse with him, and without a horse he wouldn't be able to carry the gold away. He would need a horse and wagon, in fact, to carry it all.

Slowly Dean made his way along the shelf of rock, which seemed to extend for a long distance across the face of the hill. His hope of finding his quarry that night was almost gone, but he was not yet ready to abandon the search. He was beginning to think he had overestimated Blackie's cleverness. If he were so smart why hadn't he realized that Dean, warned by the bell trap, would keep away from the gold cache?

"I guess the cuss didn't have any choice," Dean decided presently. "He had to make sure I wasn't going to get away with the stuff while he was asleep, and so far as I can figure there wasn't any way of making sure without putting me wise. He's prob'ly made up his mind by now that I ain't going to that cache so long as he's hanging round this valley. Prob'ly knows he's gotta do a lot more thinking."

The shelf was growing narrower. Before very long he came to a sharp turn. He went on a little way beyond this point, then, deciding on strategy, retraced his steps. After passing the sharp bend in the path once more he drew himself close against the steep wall of rock that rose high above him, and, with his rifle ready for action, proceeded to wait for Blackie. He knew the man must have gone on along that same path, and that some time he would return.

It proved to be a long wait, but he was determined to remain there all night if necessary. Hours passed. Blackie might not come at all, but Dean knew that going in search of him would almost certainly be futile. He knew of no better place for his ambush. Before daylight Blackie might decide that his enemy had gone, and at any time he might come sneaking along this path or through the pass. If he should come through the narrow defile that lay between the shelf and the moraine, Dean, his eyes accustomed now to the deep darkness, would be able to see him.

Suddenly a swift-moving black cloud drifted off from the newly risen moon, and the pass was flooded with golden light. Over on the side of the moraine was Blackie Kershaw, as unprepared as Dean was for the sudden illumination. He was slipping down behind a rock when Dean raised his rifle. The rock wasn't big enough to screen him, and Dean fired. Blackie, unhurt but unable to conceal more than half his body behind the rock, realized he was about as close to death as a man could be—who had any chance of living at all. The next shot from across the pass would probably get him.

Dean, who, priding himself on his marksmanship, had felt sure his first shot was going to rid him of Blackie, was in clear view, without the smallest of barriers for his protection. At such short range the shot that rang out from the moraine the next instant could scarcely have failed to find him.

Under the shock of the bullet he dropped to his knees, and his rifle, slipping from his feeble grasp, went clattering down the slope. For a moment he thought he was lost. Then he remembered that Kershaw wouldn't want to kill him, that he would probably be glad to get his clutches on him and keep him there a helpless prisoner. He wouldn't shoot again.

Weak and dizzy though he was, Dean kept his eyes on the man on the moraine. Kershaw had come out from behind the rock and was cautiously following a precipitous, zigzag path to the bottom. The wounded man on the other side of the défile glanced down the steep slope to where his gun lay. He was desperate, ready to take any risk to escape. Unless he could regain possession of his gun quickly, his case would be hopeless. He slipped over the edge of the shelf of rock and found an uncertain foothold three or four feet below. But, as he made a hard effort to take a step still farther down, he lost his balance and went sliding and rolling to the bottom.

Stunned by the fall of fully thirty feet, he lay still for a moment. At last he managed to struggle to his feet. His rifle lay two or three steps away, and, picking it up, he looked about for Kershaw. The cautious Blackie had disappeared.

"I gotta—get to my horse—quick," he gasped out weakly. "I got just about strength enough left—to make it—maybe."

He staggered on through the pass until he came to the aspens where his horse was standing. The effort of unfastening the animal and climbing into the saddle was almost too much for him. He was barely able to hold his seat as he set off on the homeward way. He slipped a hand under his shirt. The bullet had struck him somewhere in the ribs, and he could feel a warm fluid trickling from the wound.

"If I can only just hold on," he murmured, "the horse'll find the way all right."

Even the weight of the rifle in his hands tired him. Yet Kershaw or some other enemy might appear; he didn't dare strap the weapon to the saddle. So long as he could hold a grip on it, he must keep it ready for instant use. The bleak hills seemed to be swinging round and round, and over the deep, dark cañon, which now lay close ahead, the moon was bobbing dizzily. He could scarcely keep his eyes open. He felt that the little strength that he had left was steadily slipping away. In a daze his thoughts turned dreamily to Maisie and the hidden bullion. If he should die here on the cañon trail, he mused, Maisie would be left in poverty. She would never know where he had cached the gold. What a fool he had been, he told himself, to keep her in ignorance of what he had done with it.

"I gotta hang on—that's all," he muttered thickly. "I gotta keep awake—somehow—till I get back to Maisie."

He didn't know that behind him, like a vulture following some dying beast, Blackie Kershaw was riding on his trail and was watching him steadily.

CHAPTER VII.

A FAIR EXCHANGE.

IT was almost two o'clock when Maisie, escorted by Steve Bonner, returned home from Gulchtown that night. They had ridden slowly, for there had been much to talk about. Even when they got to the cabin they both felt that a good deal remained to be said.

A troubled frown darkened Maisie's face as she discovered that her father was not at home. He had told her nothing about his plans, but she thought it probable he had gone to the valley where the cache had been made, and that he might return with part of the

stolen bullion packed on his horse. Indeed he might return laden with loot at any moment, and here was Deputy Sheriff Bonner, who showed no intention of leaving immediately.

"Since the old man's not here maybe you'll be lonesome, Maisie," he suggested. "You might as well let me come in and sit a while."

Maisie hesitated. If her father should return presently with his horse loaded with stolen gold bars, Steve would find himself in an awkward situation.

"You'd better go, Steve," she said. "I told you once that you wouldn't be liable to find Dallas Dean's daughter very safe company, considering you're tied up to Rawson. I like you all right and I guess you know that, but—well, you've had to double cross the sheriff on our account already, and you might find you'd got to trick him some more."

Steve was in distress. "I can't quit you, Maisie," he declared, "no matter what happens. I'd rather quit Rawson than break with you."

They were standing at the cabin door, with their horses close by. Maisie was looking off into the hills. She could see a long way on such a bright night as this. "Look!" she cried.

With wide, startled eyes she was staring at the steep slopes which she and her father had climbed on their way to the cañon trail. A horseman had appeared out there on the barrens and was very slowly drawing nearer.

"It's my father," she said, frowning anxiously, "and either he's sick or hurt. Look at the way he's slumped over on the saddle."

"Just all tired out, maybe," Steve decided. He gave a slight start. "Now that's kind of queer. I thought for a second I saw somebody way off behind him—just a speck. But it's gone now."

For a moment he puzzled over the speck that had disappeared so quickly. Could it have been Andy Rawson? he wondered. No use worrying about it. Whoever it was, he was gone.

Soon Dean too disappeared as his trail led him down behind the pines. After a few moments he came out of the timber into the clearing in front of the cabin.

"Dad!" Maisie cried. "What's wrong with you?"

Dean didn't answer. One arm was wound around his rifle and his hands were clinging to the saddle horn. His head was dropping forward upon his broad chest, and now and then his crumpled body gave a lurch. He looked as though he might be asleep. As she ran forward to meet him, he raised his head a little and stared at her a moment with dull, dazed eyes. The horse stopped abruptly, and in an effort to swing himself from the saddle Dean lost his balance and fell heavily to the ground. Steve lifted him up, and, with Maisie's help, managed to get him into the cabin, where they laid him on his bed.

"Don't you do no worrying about me, Maisie," the half-conscious man mumbled. "All I need's rest—that's all. Be all right again soon."

"You're wounded!" she cried as, bending over him, she discovered the stains that had been growing wider and wider on his shirt.

"Yeah, somebody got me," he admitted. "Don't ask no questions. Wouldn't do you any good to know." His half-closed eyes turned to Steve. "Bonner!" he whispered. "What's he doing here? Come to spy on me again, eh?"

"You've got me wrong, Dean," Steve assured him. "I'm not going to do any more spying on you. I can see now I've either got to break with Rawson or with Maisie, and that means I quit Rawson. I'm going to get out of here now and go for a doctor."

Dean, startled by this announcement,

tried to raise his head from the pillow. "A doctor!" he gasped out. "Looka here, Bonner! If you're a friend of ours you won't be going for no doctor. Doctors talk. I don't want the news spread all over Gulchtown that I got back here to-night with a bullet in me."

This outburst seemed to exhaust the wounded man. He gave a long, tired sigh; his eyes closed, and he was silent. After a few minutes Maisie, having attended as well as she could to his needs, beckoned Steve to follow her and turned to leave the room. Dean called her back.

"Gimme my rifle," he whispered.

She placed the gun beside him on the bed and left him alone.

"He knows somebody's after him," Steve said softly as he and Maisie passed into another room. "That must have been why he wanted his gun."

"He's never satisfied without that gun beside him whether he's awake or asleep," she explained. "He seems to have an idea always that somebody's after him."

"Well, it's a sure thing somebody was after him and got him," said Steve. "And whoever that was may not be satisfied yet. I could swear that when your father was out there on the hills I got my eyes on somebody behind him."

"I'm not going to worry about that," she decided. "It's his wound that I'm thinking about now. Dad knows a lot about treating wounds, and I guess he'll be able to do something for it himself, if he's strong enough after he's had a sleep. But his wound may be dangerous. He ought to have a doctor, I know. But we can't get one. If we did dad would never forgive us. And it wouldn't be safe, anyway, Steve. We don't know what kind of trouble he may have been mixed up in to-night. We can't let anybody know that he came home with a bullet wound."

There were a few moments of dead silence while they both pondered the situation. Out of this silence came some slight sound that caught Bonner's attention.

"Listen, Maisie!" he whispered. "Did you hear anything?"

With a suspicion that somebody was outside the cabin, he was staring at the bare window.

"The wind, I guess," she said indifferently.

"There isn't any wind, Maisie. It's a dead-still night. Maybe it was the horses. I better go out and put yours and your father's in the shed. I'll water 'em and bed 'em so you won't have to bother."

While he was crossing the room on his way to the door, he heard the window open. Startled, he swung round to face it. A man was leaning over the sill with a rifle in his hands. The man was Blackie Kershaw, and the rifle was pointing at Bonner.

"I gotcha, bo," said Blackie. "Put your hands up; and don't try no tricks or this thing'll go off. I'm an awful nervous crittur, and my trigger finger's liable to twitch. Don't move now, neither of yuh. I'm comin' in."

He crawled through the window so slowly and carefully that his eyes did not leave Bonner and the girl for an instant, nor did the rifle swerve from pointing in their direction. Now that he was in the room, he seemed a little uncertain of what to do next. He observed that there were three doors and that all of them were closed. In one of them was a key. It was this door with the key in the lock that he studied for a moment with the corner of an eye. Presently, while continuing to keep his prisoners covered with the gun, he stepped over to it, turned the knob very slowly and quietly and pulled it open half an inch. Then, discovering that he was looking into a clothes closet, he drew the door open wide.

"This looks like just the right place for you two," he decided. "Get in there

quick now, and don't make no fuss about it."

Maisie didn't budge. Her face flushed angrily, and there was rebellion in her eyes.

"Now, looka here, sweetness," said Blackie softly as he turned to her, "don't yuh try anything on me. You get too gay, and this gun's gointa go off sure."

"What have you come here for?" she demanded.

"I ain't tellin' my business. G'wan in there now, both of yuh. I ain't got all night to wait."

Neither Maisie nor Steve were ready to obey, and Blackie's expression grew threatening. "Ladies hafta cut up somethin' fierce before I feel like shootin' 'em," he muttered, "and somehow I can't bring myself to plug yuh with a bullet, sweetness, like I ought. But if yuh keep on actin' stubborn, somebody else is gointa get plugged all right, and that's little Stevey. Yes, ma'am, there's gointa be lilies on little Stevey's chest if yuh ain't awful careful. P'raps yuh don't know me, Stevey, but I've had my blinkers on yuh more'n once. G'wan now."

Maisie's eyes were fastened on the intruder in sharp appraisal, and his appearance was not reassuring. She was convinced that a man with such a face as his would be likely to carry out his threat. This must be the man, she reasoned, who had wounded her father, and who had now come to finish the job. She knew she was helpless; that to refuse to obey would be worse than futile. She couldn't help her father, but she could very easily put Steve's life in peril. After a moment she decided that her father, even though wounded, was pretty likely to take care of himself.

"We'll have to do as he says, Steve," she said as she stepped to the door that Blackie had opened.

Steve's fists were clenched, and he was breathing hard. Apparently he was tempted to spring on the man who with leveled rifle was now facing him. Maisie, suspecting he was about to do something as foolish as that, caught hold of him. "Steve! Please!" she implored him. "You can't do anything. Don't be a fool."

She drew him slowly along into the closet, and Blackie closed the door on them and locked it quickly.

Another door opened into a little hall. Blackie, having carefully studied the interior of the cabin by peering in at windows, knew that on the other side of this hall was the room where Dean was lying. He had watched the old outlaw grow weaker and weaker on the ride along the Bear Cañon trail and he knew that his wound was serious. He wasn't afraid of him now; in fact, he didn't believe the old man could even raise himself from his bed.

Blackie was here to squeeze the secret out of him. He had not been quite sure how he was going to force Dean to tell where he had hidden the bullion. Now he knew. The idea had come to him at the moment he had seen Maisie run across the clearing to meet her father. He was going to tell Dean that he would have to disclose the secret to save his daughter's life. Dean, knowing Blackie's character, would not make the mistake of believing the man was merely bluffing.

Kershaw crossed the hall and stood listening. He could hear the wounded man's heavy, laborious breathing, and decided he was probably asleep. Softly he pushed the door open an inch or two. A lamp was burning in the room, but it was turned low, and the light was dim. He saw his enemy stretched out on the bed on the other side of the room from the door; but he failed to discover whether he was asleep or awake, and the rifle lying on the blankets escaped his observation.

Blackie stepped inside. The man on

the bed was waiting for him. The rifle moved slightly on the blankets. A shot rang out, and a bullet creased the intruder's scalp. Blackie, who had scarcely been prepared for such a reception, fired three times rapidly. As he sent his third shot, another bullet from Dean's gun caught him, and he dropped.

The old outlaw on the bed watched him for a moment, saw his crumpled body stiffen out on the floor, and was satisfied. Exhausted he sank back on the pillow. "He got me—got me again," he whispered to himself.

A crashing sound rang through the cabin. Bonner was smashing his way through the door of his prison. A vigorous thrust of his heavy body splintered the wood. The next moment he kicked out a panel, and, reaching an arm through this aperture, succeeded in turning the key, which had been left in the lock.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GOLD CACHE.

WHEN Dean returned to consciousness and opened his eyes, he saw Maisie standing beside his bed. Still dazed he lay blinking at her for a few moments, and making an effort to pull his wits together. After a time his gaze wandered about the room. There was nobody there but Maisie and himself—not even a dead man on the floor.

"What you done with him?" he asked, pointing at the spot where Blackie had fallen.

"Steve dragged him out behind the house," she answered. "We'll have to leave him there till we can figure out what we ought to do." For a moment she studied her father's face. "Was it Kershaw, dad?"

The ghost of a smile hovered for an instant on Dean's grim lips. "The same sneaking cuss—Blackie Kershaw," he said, "and I got him! He'd made up his mind it was all up with poor old Dallas Dean; but I fooled him." He gave a feeble laugh. The fact that he had at last won the hide-and-seek game, he had been playing with Blackie, made him happy. After a moment he grew serious again. "Bonner gone?" he asked.

"No, dad. He's across the hall."

"Think we can trust him, Maisie? Think you've got him trained so's he won't do no squealing to Rawson?"

"I'm ready to trust him all my life," she said pensively. "He's asked me to marry him, and—and I'm going to."

"Huh? You're going to marry him? Why, I thought you was playing him for a sucker, Maisie—just stringing him along so's he wouldn't squeal. You ain't going to marry him because you're afraid of him, eh?"

"You needn't worry," she said with a laugh. "I'm not afraid of him, not even a little bit. I'm going to marry him because I want him, of course. He knows you and me are going to stick together, and that we've got to help you keep clear of the law. From now on he'll be on your side, dad. You can bet on that."

Dean pondered this information for a long time. "I guess we're going to need him," he concluded with a sigh. "I s'pose I oughta be glad. If this wound of mine should happen to get serious, I wouldn't wanta think of having to leave you alone in the world."

He didn't tell her that there was now a second wound, and that he was not quite sure he was going to pull through. If he could live long enough to get the bullion and to turn it into money for Maisie, he wouldn't have any reason to worry about how soon death was going to get him. He was getting old and tired. With the knowledge that he had made Maisie rich he could die in peace. Now he knew that no matter how dangerous his wounds might be he must make one last tremendous effort. He must muster all his fail-

ing strength for one more visit to the walled valley.

"Bonner always looked on the level to me," he whispered. "And I guess we're in a fix where we've gotta trust him a whole lot. We need him right now, for we've gotta get that gold and make our get-away before the day's over. It ain't safe to stay here no more."

Maisie stared at him in perplexity. "Not safe? Why—I thought that with Steve on our side you'd feel sure Rawson wouldn't be able to prove anything against you."

"But now Blackie Kershaw's dead," he muttered. "We might hide him somewheres. But—I dunno. It'd make it look too much like plain murder if he was ever found. It might get all three of us in bad. I guess it'd be better to hit a long, long trail outa here as quick as we can."

"But you killed him in self-defense," she argued. "You could surely prove that."

"Yeah, I s'pose so. But there's more to it than that. Blackie Kershaw happened to be the only one of our bunch who was seen and recognized at the time of the train holdup. Rawson'll know him when he finds him dead, and he'll know Blackie and me was fighting about the swag. I've got a hunch he'll be ready to lock me up when he finds Kershaw here. And that ain't all, either. Kershaw's got friends. They know I was in on that holdup job, and when they find out I've killed him, they'll squeal."

"You're too weak to make a get-away now, dad."

Dean raised himself feebly on his elbows. His big hands were gripping the rifle. His dark eyes burned with fierce determination. "I'm going even if it kills me!" he said. "Nobody can say I ever showed any yaller streak and quit when I was up against it. I've always put up a fight clear through to the finish; and that's what I'm gointa do now."

Presently Steve came into the room. Dean studied the young man's face for a few moments curiously. "Bonner," he said at last, "if you're gointa marry Maisie I guess I gotta put you wise to what's up. You've guessed some of it already, maybe. I'm in bad shape, but there's reasons why I gotta beat it outa here fast. I ain't gointa go empty handed. There's more'n six hundred pounds of gold cached up in that valley where Rawson had us trapped, and, if I can get away with that stuff, I'll be satisfied. If I croak I can leave Maisie rich. I can't get it alone. You're gointa help me."

Steve's face clouded. He had been ready to do what he could to save Dean from prison, but he hadn't expected to be called upon for such crooked work as this. "I've got some money of my own," he said after a little hesitation. "Couple of thousand dollars stowed away—what I've saved up from washing gravel over at the placers. That ought to be enough for your get-away. The three of us can live on it some time. What's the use of running the risk of prison with that stolen stuff. Let's forget it."

But Maisie was beside him now, looking up pleadingly into his face, and his resolution was beginning already to falter. "You know dad would never be willing to give up all that wealth, Steve," she said. "He's always had a horror of dying poor, and now to give up this big chance would break his heart. Don't be a fool, Steve. We're not hurting anybody by taking that gold. It belongs to a company that's so rich, they'll never miss it."

Her coaxing won his consent at last, for he was desperately in love with Maisie. But he shook his head doubtfully as he looked at her father. "He doesn't look as if he could even hold his seat on a horse," he decided, "and

that's a hard trail through Bear Cañon. After that we'll be camping for days on our way through the hills, till we get to some place where it'll be safe to hop a train. How are we going to carry over six hundred pounds of gold?"

"We'll have four horses," Dean reminded him. "One of 'em's Kershaw's. That'll be the lead horse, with more'n half the stuff packed on his back. We oughta carry the rest of it on our saddles all right. There ain't nothing much in this house worth taking with us. We'll be traveling light, except for the gold."

Maisie stepped to the window and lifted the shade. It was broad daylight. She suggested that it might be wiser to wait for night, but her father protested that there was no time to lose.

"It's a mighty lonesome trail through the cañon," he argued, "at all hours. And after we've got the stuff we'll be on a still lonesomer one. No need to fear folks'll see us. We're gointa get ready to travel right now. If you've got anything you need in Gulchtown, Bonner, you can come back for it after we've got the swag salted away a thousand miles from here somewheres."

There was an old packsaddle in the shed, and it occurred to Dean that it could be put on Kershaw's horse. The riding saddle on the animal now wouldn't be of much use for packs. It took Steve and Maisie only half the morning to pack the supplies and to make everything ready for the long journey.

While the horses stood waiting at the cabin door, Dean dragged himself feebly from his bed. Only the fires of grim, desperate resolution seemed to be keeping him alive. The crisp morning air refreshed him as he came into the clearing. As he looked at the horses, they reminded him of something he had forgotten. "I reckon there must have been something wrong with my memory," he said to Steve. "We're gointa have five horses instead of four. My own black's up at the valley where Kershaw's been keeping it. That'll mean lighter loads, and we'll be able to travel faster."

Steve helped him into the saddle. The young man noticed that even the slight effort involved in mounting the horse told very perceptibly on Dean's strength, and that he seemed to be in pain. If Bonner had known the old outlaw had two fresh bullet holes in his body instead of one, he might have voiced a protest against setting out on the hard trip that lay before them.

Before they were halfway through Bear Cañon, Dean began to show signs of growing faint. His head dropped; his hands gripped the saddle horn. Sometimes he rode with his eyes closed. He said scarcely a word, and then his voice was only a hoarse, strained whisper. Somehow he managed to hold out till they got to the valley. Then, as they rode into it, Steve saw him swaying helplessly.

"Brace up, Dean!" he cried. "We're there already. You'll have a chance to rest pretty soon."

Dean fell forward upon the saddle horn and his big body went limp. A despairing oath came faintly from his lips. One foot slipped loose, and, if Steve had not caught him, he would have fallen to the ground.

"His wound must be even worse than we thought," Steve muttered dejectedly to Maisie as he laid the old man on the grass. "It looks like it had broken loose, too. He ought to have laid still for weeks, prob'ly."

Maisie bathed her father's face with water from a canteen, and then remained kneeling beside him with her face full of alarm. Dean was beginning to mumble incoherently. When his eyes opened, there was a strange glare in them. She bent low to catch his scarcely audible words.

"The gold!" she heard. "Go get it,

Maisie. We gotta have it. I don't wanta—pass out broke—and knowin' you'll—be broke."

"But, dad! We don't know where it is!" she cried.

In despair he struggled to speak once more. "Water!" he gasped out.

She put the canteen to his lips, but, shaking his head, he pushed it away.

Maisie turned in perplexity to Steve. "What can he mean?" she asked. "He's crying for water and he won't drink it."

"In the water!" her father whispered. His eyes closed and he grew silent.

"The stuff must be cached in water somewhere," Steve interpreted. "But, Maisie, we better forget about that gold and be thinking about what we can do for him. I knew it was a crazy thing to do to bring a man in his condition on a trip like this. And now I'm scared about him. What'll we do?"

"Steve, if he can set his eyes on that gold, it'll do him more good than medicine. That's all we can do for him. Somehow we've got to find it."

"There's a pond in that valley," Steve remembered. "Maybe that's the water he means. I can see it now. Look over there toward those pines. Can't you see the sun shining on a patch of water?"

Her father seemed to be asleep, and after watching him for a time she and Steve mounted their horses and rode toward the pond. When they came to its rocky shore, it failed to offer much encouragement.

"Why, it's more than a hundred feet across!" Maisie exclaimed in dismay. "If the gold is cached there, we'll never find it."

On foot they circled the stretch of water, studying the shore closely, but there was no sign of a cache. Hopelessly they rode back to the spot where Dean was lying. The old man's eyes were closed, and he was breathing heavily. They spoke to one another in whispers, fearing to wake him. Despondently Steve stared off over the hills, where the sun was setting.

"We'll have to camp here for the night," he observed, "maybe for a good many nights if he's no better. And since we can't get a doctor for him, he's liable to get worse."

Maisie thought of Blackie Kershaw lying dead behind the cabin, and she shuddered. "We wouldn't dare get a doctor for dad, Steve. There's only two doctors within a hundred miles of here, and both of them are friends of Rawson. Just forget about doctors. We've got to trust to luck. That's what dad would say—trust to luck."

Dean, snugly tucked in blankets, slept on while Maisie and Steve were busy with the work of the camp. Steve, while the girl was cooking supper, went in search of the black horse her father had been compelled to leave behind him at the time of his escape from the posse. He found the animal at the spot where the luckless Billy Coran had camped for a week and which Kershaw seemed to have been using as his supply base. Dean's saddle and bridle were here, too. A little investigation revealed a grub supply which, added to their own, would keep them from running short of provisions for perhaps a week. He let the black horse remain where it was for the night and rode back to Maisie and her father.

On the way he stopped at the pond. The patch of water was black and dismal and forbidding now under the stars. As he sat in his saddle staring at it, he grew more and more doubtful of the idea that it held the old man's secret. Surely Dean would have found some more practicable hiding place for the bullion, he mused. Here it might have sunk so deep that it would never be recovered. How could Dean have expected to get possession of it again himself from the depths of this dark pool?

For a few moments a floating tree stump held his attention. It struck

him as curious that the stump, though it was always slowly moving—driven by the light variable winds—never got very far away from a certain point. It crept, sometimes with a movement so slow as to be almost imperceptible, around and around, always in the same circle. He reasoned that there must be something peculiar about the flow of the water that held the stump in one spiral current.

He shrugged his shoulders and rode on. It seemed futile to search for the cache until Dean should be able to tell them definitely where it lay. He wasn't sure that Dean was ever going to be able to tell. He was evidently a badly wounded man, and, if the bullet had remained in his body, blood poisoning might set in and carry him off quickly.

The night had brought a sharp chill into the air, and Maisie's fire was burning brightly.

"I found the horse," he told her as he rode up to the spot where she was sitting beside the fire. "He's tied up where Kershaw's been keeping his grub over at the other end of the valley. Thought I better leave him there for a while. Kershaw'd left water for him, and I staked him out in a new grazing spot. Your father woke up yet?"

"He hasn't waked once," she answered. "Maybe a long sleep will bring his strength back."

Steve staked his horse out for the night and returned to the fire. For a long time he and Maisie sat there talking together in low tones. The light of the flames was on her face, and she looked tired and miserable. But his suggestion that it was time for her to roll up in her blankets didn't appeal to her.

"I couldn't sleep now, Steve," she said. "I've got too much trouble on my mind."

"Don't worry, Maisie. It don't do any good. Maybe the old man'll be started on the road to getting well by morning. And then our troubles'll be pretty near over."

Over by the tall, black pines, half a mile or more away, the patch of water was barely discernible in the starlight. For a little while it held Steve's attention. "Kind of a queer thing I noticed over on that pond," he said presently. "There's a big stump of a tree floating round but it never gets anywhere. Just keeps moving in a little circle."

He couldn't get that stump out of his thoughts. Slowly an inspiration came to him.

"Glory!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet. "I believe I've got the big idea, Maisie. That stump! It's fastened to the gold cache!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN IN THE TIMBER.

THE girl was not so sure that Steve had solved the problem. She couldn't understand for one thing why her father would have sunk almost seven hundred pounds of gold in deep water where, as she reasoned, not one man nor half a dozen would be able to raise it.

"If it's there we'll have to have a derrick, Steve, if we're ever going to get it," she argued. "It's more likely that one of the roots of that stump is caught on the bottom, But we might as well go and find out just to satisfy you."

The water was such a short distance away that it was scarcely worth while to saddle their horses. They set off on foot, after Maisie had assured herself that her father was still asleep. Arriving at the pond, they walked along its rocky edge until they came to the point nearest to the floating stump. For a few moments they stood watching it. Slowly it crept closer to them, until it was almost within their reach. Then it stopped abruptly and began to move

away. Steve stretched himself out on the rock and then waited for it to return.

"If it comes that near again, I guess I can just about get it," he decided.

Two or three minutes passed while the stump floated lazily in its orbit. Now it was coming back. Presently, reaching out as far as he dared, Steve got an insecure hold on it with one hand. He managed to prevent it from floating away again but he was unable to draw it any nearer. After struggling with it for a moment, he abandoned the effort as hopeless, but he had a definite idea of what he was going to do next. He walked away a few steps into the timber and pulled a branch from one of the smaller trees. On the end where he had wrested it from the trunk was a gnarled hook. By the time he had returned to the edge of the water the floating stump was again on its way toward the shore. After waiting for it to come closer, he succeeded in driving the sharp hook of the branch into it firmly. Slowly but steadily, by a strong effort, he drew the stump nearer and nearer.

Yet the fact that he was so far successful was discouraging to Maisie. "You couldn't do that if it was fastened to six hundred pounds of gold," she reasoned.

Steve, his hands groping around the stump now, made a curious discovery the next moment. Tied to one of its tough knots was a strong, taut cord, which was fastened evidently to something at the bottom of the water. Getting a grip on this cord, he pulled on it. It was weighted heavily, but the weight was moving.

"It's coming up!" he exclaimed.

Maisie laughed. "Not six hundred pounds of gold, Steve. Something's down there, but it can't be what we're after."

"I'm afraid you're right, Maisie," he admitted. "This is more like twenty pounds. But we're going to find out, anyhow."

The thing came to the surface presently, and Maisie gave a gasp of astonishment. It was a gleaming bar of gold.

Steve's eyes were sparkling. The lure of wealth had got hold of him at last, and he had forgotten his scruples and his fears. Kneeling on the rock with the bullion in his hands, he stared at it speechless. The touch of it thrilled him. In the starlight it was glistening like a burning ember.

"Gold!" he muttered. "Pure gold! Maisie, even if the old man never speaks another word, you're going to be rich."

For Steve had discovered that the cord was still fastened to the bottom and he was beginning to understand the ingenious method that had been followed in caching the bullion. After a minute or two another bar of gold came to the surface, and before long on the shelf of rock where they were standing lay a great pile of gleaming treasure.

From the fascinating display of wealth Maisie raised her eyes with a start. For a moment she held her breath as she crouched listening. "I thought I heard something, Steve! Something in the woods!"

"Some animal passing through there maybe," he said indifferently.

The next instant he discovered that it was a human animal—a man—or the ghost of a man. He half believed for a moment that it was the ghost of Blackie Kershaw.

Kershaw was lying dead, miles away at a deserted cabin; yet here he was facing them from the shadow of the timber with a rifle at his shoulder. The rifle was pointing at Steve menacingly.

"Yeah, Stevey, I gotcha!" Blackie cried, chuckling. "Don't look scared, Stevey. I ain't no ghost. Maybe I look sorta like one, but that's owin' to the fact that I'm feelin' a bit weak from bein' plugged by a bullet and from

havin' to foot it all this way along the cañon trail. But here I am, just in time to find out where the swag lies."

Maisie, with a faint hope of being able to slip off unobserved and of arming herself with her father's rifle, was stealing silently along the edge of the water. She had gone only a few steps, however, when Blackie's voice stopped her.

"Come back here, sweetness!" he called. "I'd like to turn yuh loose but I can't trust yuh. Yuh're a chip o' the old block, and yuh might get dangerous. Furthermore I wanta have a talk with you and Stevey. I'm feelin' lonesome —pinin' fer company after that long walk I've had on a dark trail."

Blackie drew nearer. As he came out of the shadows of the trees he looked ghastly. An ugly wound was across his forehead and had spread a hideous smear over his white face. He walked with a limp. In his stained shirt was a round hole which had been made presumably by a bullet from Dallas Dean's gun.

"Kind of bunged up, ain't I, Stevey?" he said with a grin. "But never mind, so long as I got here. It was this way, Stevey. When old Dallas come to life and started shootin', and one of his bullets knocked me over, I could see only one chance of livin'. If I'd moved he'd have plugged me again. So I made up my mind I'd better stay dead fer a while."

For a moment he seemed to be absorbed in thought. "I guess I better march yuh both back to where the old man's lyin'," he decided. "Then sweetness can cook me a nice supper, fer I'm as hungry as a wolf; and after that I'll hafta take them hosses and load the gold on 'em."

Not very long after Blackie presented himself to the two gold hunters at the pond, old Dallas Dean opened his eyes and blinked at the stars. Presently he made an effort to crawl out of his blankets, but as he stirred his wounds put him in agony, and he sank back with a groan.

"Maisie!" he called in a hoarse whisper.

Getting no answer, he turned his head and looked toward the firelight. After a moment he discovered that he was alone; his eyes, bright with fever, began to search the valley for Maisie and Steve.

At last he caught sight not only of two figures but of three, moving slowly toward the camp. He was able to distinguish Maisie and Bonner, but the other man was a mystery. A puzzled frown came over his face. Certain that trouble had come, he watched the unknown figure like a hawk. And presently he recognized it. "Kershaw!" he gasped out. "So he played possum and fooled me, the sneaking cuss!"

Again he struggled out of the blankets, gritting his teeth at the pain of his wounds. He staggered to his feet. Nausea and dizziness swept over him, but a crisis had come that he must meet, no matter what it cost him in suffering. Somewhere among the packs over by the fire he knew that his rifle was lying. He took a few feeble, uncertain steps, sank to his knees, rose with a violent effort, and staggered on. His strength was deserting him rapidly. His breath was coming and going in great gasps.

Somehow he held out till, moving into the firelight, he saw his gun lying at his feet. Exhausted, he sank beside the weapon and lay still. He could barely see. The fire was wheeling giddily before his dim eyes, and the valley and the hills were only a blur. The three figures, though they were nearer now, had become mere specks. One of these specks held his attention more than the others. There was something about it that told him it was Blackie Kershaw. With his gun at his shoulder he waited.

The glow of the fire was on Blackie now, and Dean raised his gun. A moment later a shot rang out, and Blackie tumbled.

CHAPTER X.

STEVE CHOOSES HIS TRAIL.

IT was no trick that Blackie Kershaw was playing this time. Dean's bullet had caught him between the eyes. He was dead beyond the slightest doubt. With a grim smile on his bearded face, the man who had killed him watched the body that lay sprawled out in the light of the fire.

"Dead men tell no tales," he whispered to himself. "We're safe at last —Maisie and me—safe and rich."

The dancing flames made him dizzy, and he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he was lying in his blankets, and the sun was shining on them. Beside him Maisie was kneeling, and when he saw that there were tears in her eyes he was puzzled. He was puzzled, too, to find himself so weak, so breathless. He discovered that he could not even raise his hands. Even his dogged determination was gone. He no longer had the will nor even the desire to make an effort to escape with his stolen treasure. Then the truth came to him. He was dying.

"The gold, Maisie," he whispered. "I gotta tell you before I pass out. It's in the pond. You and Bonner can make your get-away with it all right. Gold enough to make you rich, Maisie."

She told him of how Steve and she had found the hidden bullion, and of how they had been caught by Blackie Kershaw. Her father smiled as she spoke of Blackie.

"I got the cuss," he whispered. "And the swag's all yours, Maisie. So I guess I oughta be satisfied."

Several minutes passed before he spoke again, and then his whisper was almost inaudible. Maisie, bending low, could scarcely catch the words. "I got him!" he muttered. "Dead men tell no tales."

Presently she turned away sobbing. The old outlaw had passed on. And all the tales he could have told of his lurid past had gone with him; tales that he had always kept secret from Maisie.

There were consolations in Maisie's thoughts, as she grieved for her father. She had Steve, and she had wealth. They could set out on some lonely trail and leave danger far behind them.

Before the day was over Steve dug two graves under a towering pine tree. They buried Dean and his enemy beside one another. There was nothing to mark their resting place, and Steve felt that they would always remain unmarked. Such men as Dean and Blackie should lie in nameless graves, their crimes forgotten. If there had been headstones it was doubtful whether he or Maisie could have thought of an appropriate inscription for either of them except the words "dead men tell no tales."

"The crooked paths don't pay," Steve muttered to himself as he brooded over the fate of these two outlaws. "Little use was the gold they stole to either of 'em."

He began to prepare for the long journey through the hills, but as the time came to pack the bullion on the horses he stood hesitating. Maisie might be happy with the stolen treasure, but he was beginning to doubt it. There was a curse on it. It had brought bad luck to every thief who had touched it.

"Maisie," he said at last, "we're starting off on a crooked trail through life, and it'll bring us to a bad end. It looks to me like we'd be a derned sight wiser to choose a straight one."

Maisie was puzzled. "What are you talking about, anyhow, Steve?" she asked. "I'm going to go as straight as a string, and so are you, I hope."

"We can't take that gold with us if we're going straight, Maisie."

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"We can make a clean get-away with that stuff," she said, "and Rawson will never be wise to us. So what are you scared about?"

Steve dropped the subject, and before long he and Maisie were at the pond packing the bullion onto the horses. According to Maisie's plan they were going to travel for half the night. She felt there was danger that Rawson would discover that she and her father had deserted their cabin, and his hunt for them might extend a good many miles through the hills.

It was growing dark when, with their five horses and the bullion, they were ready to leave the valley. As they emerged from the narrow pass Steve turned his horse toward the Bear Cañon Trail.

"You must be dreaming, Steve," exclaimed Maisie. "You're heading the wrong way."

"I'm heading for Gulchtown," he said sharply. "That's where we're going."

She gasped in amazement. "Have you gone crazy?" she cried. "There'll be a jail waiting for us in Gulchtown."

"I guess not, Maisie, if we go straight to Andy Rawson and turn this gold over to him. That's what I've got in mind to do. I've chosen the trail we're going to travel, you and me, for the rest of our days; it's not going to be a crooked one. We don't want to take on all the bad luck that goes with this stolen stuff."

Maisie turned her blue eyes to Steve and studied him dubiously. The fierce determination she saw written in his face reminded her of her savage, strong-willed old father. "I guess maybe you know the difference better than I do between crooked trails and straight ones," she said after a few moments of silence. "I'll let you choose the way. And wherever you go I'll follow—yes, I'll be coming along with you, no matter whether it's a crooked way or a straight one."

They rode on along the cañon trail. It was slow traveling on that rough, narrow way with five horses, and it was late in the night when they drew up before Gulchtown's hotel, where Andy Rawson lived.

Andy hadn't gone to bed. He was a man of late hours, and to-night he was busier than usual. The fact that Maisie Dean had failed to appear as usual at Palace Hall had started a train of suspicion in his mind that had led him to her father's cabin. Having found it deserted he was now getting some men together to hunt Dean down. He was standing in the lobby, his big hat tilted down over one eye as always and a chew of tobacco in his mouth, when he discovered Steve Bonner walking toward him. He had been looking for Steve for two days and had wondered whether his young deputy's disappearance was connected in any way with Maisie Dean's.

"What's the matter with you?" the sheriff demanded. "You look like you'd got a heap o' trouble on yer mind. And where have you been fer two days, anyhow?"

"Andy, I've come back to make a clean breast of things," said his deputy.

Andy Rawson took another bite of tobacco from his plug. "All right, Steve. Shoot!"

Then Steve told his story.

"You mean to say you've got that gold outside?" the sheriff exclaimed incredulously at last.

"I brought back the gold, and I brought back Maisie, too. We're going to get married, Andy."

Rawson shifted his tobacco to a corner of his mouth and stared at Steve for several seconds without saying a word. "Well, I'll be derned!" he exclaimed at the end of his silent meditations. "It's too bad I ain't young and handsome, too. Maybe then I'd be winning some o' these rewards that's offered for running down stolen stuff. You got ten

thousand mazumas comin' to yuh, Steve."

"What! You trying to string me, Andy?"

"No, boy, I'm tellin' yuh the honest truth. I can show yuh the posters. Ten thousand bones is what's offered fer information leadin' to the recovery of the bullion stolen from the Aladdin Smelters Company. And there ain't no reason why you shouldn't collect it with a clear conscience. With a wife to support you're surely gointa need it."

UNCLE SAM CONTINUES AS GUARDIAN OF INDIANS

THE government's guardianship over the allotments to eight hundred and five Indians of the Ford Berthold reservation in North Dakota has recently been extended for an additional ten years. Twenty-five years ago, in 1900, allotments were made to nine hundred and forty-nine of these Indians and patents were issued with a trust period of twenty-five years. The president has authority under the law to extend the government's guardianship over the Indians if he deems it for their best interest that they should not be given full control of their property.

HUNTER COPELAND'S RECORD LION

ONE of the largest mountain lions ever seen in the Southwest, fell victim a little while ago, to the prowess of Hunter Copeland of the United States biological survey. The lion was described as a "nine-foot kitten," in Copeland's report, and had been responsible for the killing of a number of horses and other live stock. At about the same time, Copeland also slew two wolves, which are supposed to have come across the Mexican border, along which he patrols. The lion was brought down in the neighborhood of Hachita, New Mexico.

TRAPPED ON MOUNTAIN LEDGE

WHILE climbing a mountain near the State game lodge near Rapid City, South Dakota, some weeks ago, Louis Clark and Clarence Mills were trapped on an eighteen-inch ledge. Darkness was descending and the two young men soon found that they could climb neither up nor down. Finally Clark dropped forty feet to the next ledge, breaking an ankle in the fall. Then he crawled half a mile to get help for his companion. Mills was rescued after he had clung to the side of the mountain for four hours.

Dude Duds

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Flapjack Elopes," etc.

AS the days sped by and the mail failed to arrive, "Buck" Purdy's impatience increased. "Dang it!" he muttered, "you might know 'Speed' Brinker would be on time year after year, yet when I'm expecting something important he's up and late. Well, I've got nothing better to do, so I guess I'll just mush out a few miles and see what's happened."

Whereupon Buck hooked up his team and mushed fifty miles without stopping, except for meals. This proved that not only was Buck in fine condition, but that his team also was ready for anything. As he completed the long day's trip, he noticed a light in the refuge cabin. A few minutes later Speed Brinker's dogs indicated a desire to mix with Buck's team.

Buck separated the teams, then thrust his head through the door. "What's wrong, Speed?"

"Froze a foot and it's been giving me a lot of trouble. I kinda figured you'd be showing up on account of that important mail you've been expecting!"

Buck reddened. "How'd you know I was expecting important mail."

"Well, there's a registered package, not so very large, addressed to you, and it's a cinch you must know it was coming. Besides that, you've been sparking the school-teacher a lot."

Buck grunted. "So's some others I could mention. Well, anything I can do for you?"

"Yeah, you can get the mail to camp! I've got twelve reels of new fillums, including Norman Westcott's Northern feature which is called 'Dust in Stacks!'"

"Norman Westcott in 'Dust in Stacks,' eh?" queried Buck. "Wait'll the camp hears about it!"

Buck took possession of the mail the following morning and, much to his surprise, discovered three registered packages. They were exactly alike, and each came from the same exclusive jeweler in Seattle. One was addressed to "Windy" Brown, the other to "White-vest" Horton.

"And there's only one girl in camp this winter; that's Molly McGuire. It sure looks like Windy and White-vest had designs on my girl." As he delivered the packages to the other men, he did not comment, but he experienced a strange sensation. What if Windy and

White-vest had made better progress than he?

He had not mentioned the matter of love to Molly, preferring to do it in the approved motion-picture fashion. First a man selected the proper setting; then he took her hand, and, while she shyly avoided his glance, he poured forth the old, sweet story. Then he fumbled in his pocket and brought forth the ring, which he slipped onto her finger. Whereupon she smiled happily through her tears, and they clinched. When Buck rehearsed this scene in his mind, it was so vivid that he could almost hear the scraping of feet as the spectators left the theater. So Buck had sent for the ring. So, too, had Windy Brown and White-vest Horton.

"I'll sure have to work fast," Buck muttered.

The return trip was made in two days. Buck timed his arrival so that the feature, "Dust in Stacks," could be shown that evening. The schoolhouse served both as theater and church on occasion, and, with this in mind, it was not mere chance that put Buck into camp at Monday noon instead of late Sunday afternoon; it was darned good judgment.

He turned over the mail and films to the proper individuals, then shaved, slicked up, donned his best pair of moccasins, and arrived at the schoolhouse five minutes after the last child had taken his departure. This, too, was good judgment.

"G'afternoon, Molly," he said pleasantly.

"Why, Buck, where have you been?" She sure did look cute standing there in the modish duds she had brought from outside. Buck was sorely tempted to speak his mind, but he decided the setting was not just right.

"Oh, I mushed down and got the mail, Molly. And, say, I brought that great epic of the North, I believe they call it, 'Dust in Stacks,' a five-reeler. I sure would feel honored if you'd let me take you to-night."

"Why, Buck, that is nice of you. What time?"

"Oh, I'll blow around the usual time, Molly," said Buck happily.

As he returned to the general store he noticed the advertising was already displayed. In the offing, with a wary eye on the schoolhouse, he saw White-vest and Windy. Buck could afford to chuckle. In the privacy of his cabin he examined the ring. He had sent a small poke of gold south and ordered the best ring the poke would buy. It was a beauty. Buck turned it slowly and found deep contentment in the flashes of fire from the depths of the diamond. "Dog-gone," he said, sighing, "I feel like kneading dough with my front paws and purring."

The remainder of the day was spent in dreaming and rehearsing the scene he was to bring about that night. "I'll take her hand gently; then I'll say, 'Molly, I love you and——' Well, I don't know what else I'll say, but love will put the proper words in my mouth. Let's see, I'd better take her left hand with my left hand; that'll leave my right hand free to fish out the ring and slip it on, me being right-handed. Then I'll let go and grab her with both hands. Gosh darn, but love is a great thing! I feel like going out and slapping a brown bear on the snoot."

From which one might be justified in suspecting Buck was in love.

The hum of the projecting machine filled the room, while in the distance came the grunting exhaust of the power plant that furnished juice to the camp when the cold grip of winter had frozen up the creek supplying water power. Buck was moved to sit close, but he did not because Windy and White-vest were occupying seats directly behind. The pair had "stagged" it, and, if they

could not escort the fair Molly to the show, they could at least garner a few crumbs of happiness by listening to her soft voice and pleasant laughter. As for Buck, he was in a mood to commit murder or at least assault and battery.

Making due allowance for the fact the picture was filmed several thousand miles from Alaska, it was very good. The hero was at his best, battling and smiling his way through five reels.

"There!" Molly exclaimed suddenly, a few yards before the grand clinch. "There is my idea of a beautifully dressed gentleman. Only a big, broad-shouldered man could look good in such clothing."

Buck remembered his own rugged garb; his moccasins, his parka which smelled none too sweet on occasion. Without realizing it, Molly had tossed a bucket of cold water all over Buck. The pair behind also caught her words. Unconsciously they remembered their own clothing. "Isn't he great?" whispered Molly. "And such clothes, too. I could love a man like that. Clothes may not make the man, but they certainly help out a lot."

"It's sure some suit," Buck admitted, at the same time shoving the ring deeper into his pocket. To-night was no time to pop the all-important question.

When the lights flashed on, Buck noticed White-vest and Windy had disappeared. "I'll meet you outside," Buck explained hastily. "I see two of your children—I mean a couple of your pupils—want to say something to you."

Buck stalked from the room in a determined manner. He recalled, as he entered, seeing two "stills" in front. They were large photographs showing important scenes in the play. In each Norman Westcott and his important-looking clothing stood out, as a hero should. Buck resolved to steal one of the stills, send it south, and order a suit exactly like it. He shouldered his way to the street and looked about. Both stills were missing. In the gloom a block away he saw the fading forms of White-vest and Windy going their separate ways. He noticed each held an arm close to his side as if gripping something concealed beneath a parka.

"Looks like they were getting set for some swell duds, too," he muttered. "Now how am I going to tell that tailor in Seattle just what I want? If I only had a picture to send, it'd be easy, because he's got my measurements."

The appearance of Molly interrupted his thoughts somewhat rudely. Together they strolled toward her cabin. It certainly was far different than he had planned. By this time, according to schedule, he should be well advanced in the matter of proposal. Her comments chiefly concerned Norman Westcott's ability to wear fine clothing. Well, he couldn't blame her much. She was from the outside, where clothes counted more. In Alaska a man was measured by his ability to act quick under dangerous circumstances, his strength and skill on the trail, and his fitness to be a "pardner" in every sense of the word. But Buck was winning an outside girl.

The following morning Buck was awakened by the postmaster. "Buck," he requested, "will you take the mail out?"

"Sure; I've nothing better to do. Can't work my mine until I get a boiler to thaw things out, and I never did like to loaf. Yes, I'll take it out."

"Not very much of importance," the postmaster explained, "but the mail's the mail. There'll be a couple of registered packages and the usual stuff."

A couple of registered packages? Buck speculated. Was it possible Windy and White-vest were returning their rings? No such luck!

As he accepted the mail a few hours later he noticed the all-important registered packages were the exact shape of a photograph. Each was addressed to a Seattle tailor. "For two cents I'd

lose 'em! It'd be a good idea if I broke through the ice somewhere and lost 'em —legally. Still, that wouldn't be fair. Hang it!"

Buck was worried. Then, as he was about to leave, he suddenly reëntered the general store. "Give me an envelope and a piece of paper," he demanded. Pulling off his mittens, he wrote to a tailor he knew real well in Seattle. It read:

DEAR PETE: Spare no expense, but go see "Dust in Stacks," the Norman Westcott picture. Then ship me by next boat a swell outfit just like he wears, including shirt, collar, tie, sox, and shoes. This is important.
BUCK PURDY.

Buck did not know just where his old friend Pete Wold would have to go in order to view the film, but he knew the order would be carried out to the letter. The letter was registered and a special-delivery stamp placed thereon; then it entered the pouch with the letters sent by his two rivals. As he mushed toward the end of steel, he felt better. At least he was having an even break. There followed an interval of six weeks during which the three attempted to strengthen their relative positions. Then word came that Brinker was coming through the pass with mail.

Three men struck off at top speed, each eying the other with frank suspicion. Speed Brinker, utterly exhausted from a fight with a blizzard in the higher levels, hailed their approach with delight. "I know what you want, and I figured you'd be waiting along the trail. There's three heavy pouches on this here sled, and in each pouch there's a large package. This is yours, Windy; and yours, White-vest, and yours, Buck."

As he spoke he heaved each pouch into the snow. "Now mush, you hounds, and may the devil get the hindermost. You've got to take 'em to the postmaster to be opened."

As the three raced away Brinker urged his tired team along at an easier pace. All the important mail was in three pouches. The rest was second-class stuff. Snow was flying right merrily as the trio raced from view.

The postmaster peered curiously at the oncoming teams. It was evident the dogs, each in perfect condition, had entered into the spirit of the thing. They raced down the final stretch of trail at top speed, and it was Buck Purdy who tossed the first sack into the postmaster's arms. "Open her up and give me that package!" he panted.

As Buck accepted and receipted for the square package, the others arrived in breathless haste. They would just about have time to don their new duds and date up the teacher before Brinker arrived with a new film. Three teams headed for home at top speed.

With eager fingers Buck opened the package. Within were several smaller packages. Buck shook out the coat and admired it. It was a sport-model affair almost the exact pattern Norman Westcott had worn. The next package yielded a pair of shoes which Buck decided were rather "loud." Buck did not know it, but they were golf shoes of latest design.

"Holy cats!" he gasped out a moment later as a pair of long socks was unearthed. The color was cream with here and there black diamonds in clusters of diamonds, connected up with fine black lines. "My gosh, does Norman Westcott wear long socks, like the women do? I'll pass up the socks; the legs of the pants will cover up my old woolens and the darned places won't show."

As he unwrapped the final package Buck all but expired. "Sufferin' Malemutes!" He was almost sobbing. "Knee pants! Knee pants! *Knee pants!* Me in knee pants!"

With something like a cold chill he recalled that Norman had worn a golf costume in one of the scenes. Evidently

the busy Pete had seen just enough of the picture to get a line on a single costume. There followed a period of deep reflection; then in the distance he caught sight of Windy, resplendent in a natty suit. Windy had flitted from his cabin to the woodshed and returned.

"I'm licked before I start," Buck thought. "I've either got to appear in public dressed like a kid or else lose her entirely." He began pacing the cabin like a caged Kodiak bear. The lines around his jaw hardened. "If I do it," he muttered, "I'll have to lick every dog and man in camp, but I'm going to do it. I'm going to bust right up to Molly with these dude duds, and strike while the iron is hot. Dog-gone, you might know I'd live in one end of town and she the other. I'll do it, still——"

He began to weaken, then he caught a view of White-vest. Except for a wrinkle in the shoulders, White-vest's clothes were knock-outs. He was heading for a certain cabin in the other end of town. It was cold enough to wear a parka, but White-vest scorned it, preferring to shiver.

That settled it! Buck began changing miner's duds for dude duds. A half hour later he clenched his fists, thrust forth his jaw, and started forth. His lead dog dashed around the cabin in anticipation of joining him. Abruptly he sat back on his haunches, drooped his ears, and slipped from view before anybody observed him. It was apparent the dog felt disgraced. Down the street two hundred yards, a Malemute snarled and rushed toward him. The cold air nipped the calves of Buck's legs so he ran a few yards and then backed up against the wall as three other dogs joined in the uproar. First his right, then his left leg shot out, and dogs went sprawling. Something ripped behind as Buck hurled a dog free. "Mush! I'll rap you on the snoot!" he bellowed, seeking a club.

"Wild Joe" Stevens emerged from the pool hall, took one look, and bellowed. "Hey, boys, come and take a look at it! If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I wouldn't believe it."

Several emerged and regarded Buck with glee. "You're a liar, Joe. That ain't an it; it's something else. Alaska never heard tell of anything like that. Fore! Fore!" he added, recalling a term in a golf story.

"Four or eight of you at once," cried Buck; "I don't care."

Wild Joe stuck his finger into his mouth and simpered; then, dancing ahead of the grim Buck, he began singing in a childish voice, "London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down!"

With a low growl Buck made a lunge and knocked Joe sprawling with his open hand. Joe leaped to his feet, all banter gone. For a moment they stood toe to toe, strong men fighting with strong men's weapons—naked fists. Then they clinched, and an instant later Joe felt himself lifted helplessly aloft and hurled into the grinning group. "Fore!" cried Buck and stalked on.

A block farther on, the cold informed him that the coat had ripped up the back from the violence of his efforts. "Long John" O'Conner, coming from the post office, stopped in his tracks; then, lifting his parka as a woman lifts her skirts, he ran, crying, "Ki-yi! Ki-yi! Ki-yiiiii!"

The imitation of a frightened pup was perfect—so perfect, in fact, that Buck started in pursuit. The first one hundred yards was covered in eleven seconds flat, and the second hundred in ten and one half seconds. A flying tackle brought Long John to earth with a grunt. Over and over they rolled, fists flew, curses came gruntingly; then John found himself being stripped of his parka.

"Aw, have a heart, Buck; I'll freeze. Have a heart!" he pleaded.

"You won't freeze if you 'ki-yi' home as fast as you 'kid-yied' down here."

Thanks to Long John's six feet seven inches of length, his parka covered Buck nicely. Buck plowed through a drift, picked up the trail, and headed for Molly's cabin. White-vest was just emerging, and Windy was just entering. Buck caught an expression of utter amazement on the young woman's face as she beheld the second exponent of the latest in sartorial art. "She looked surprised," Buck muttered, "and she hasn't seen nothing yet. Wait until I shed this parka!"

From White-vest's dejection, Buck concluded he had not been successful. Molly had undoubtedly let him down easy, but let him down, nevertheless.

As for Windy, he remained a long time. The ten minutes Buck allowed him lengthened to a half hour, then three quarters. Either Windy was having a difficult time getting started, or else his suit was succeeding. "Suit is good, either way you figure it," Buck muttered. "Ah, at last, there he comes!"

Molly smiled as she said good-by, and Windy whistled cheerfully into the frosty air. A heavy lump came into Bucks' throat. He could whip men, put dogs in their place, but, try as he would, he could not swallow that lump. There was a place in his stomach, too, that seemed to feel rather tired, or perhaps it was an apprehensive sensation. He watched Windy vanish in the distance; then he stepped up and knocked at Molly's door. He was game. He had lost, but he would wish her happiness, because he loved her and was honest in his desire.

"Hello, Buck!" she cried, looking him up and down curiously. "Won't you come in?"

"Just for a minute, Molly!"

She seemed not at all surprised when he took her hand. One can get used to most anything, and two men had just performed that selfsame rite. "Molly," Buck began, "I hope you'll be happy!"

"I hope so, too, Buck? Why?"

"Well, Windy's a good scout, even if he does blow a lot, and with the influence of a girl like you——"

"Buck Purdy, what on earth are you talking about?" she demanded.

"Why——" he began, then realized both of the hands he held were ringless. He knew that Windy had bought a ring. Well, it was just like Windy to come away whistling to deceive the world.

"Windy and White-vest were both here, and——" faltered Buck.

"And—what?" she demanded.

"Windy whistled as he left; he seemed happy!"

"Why shouldn't he be, in his dude clothes? What is the cause of the epidemic in clothing? Both of the boys are dears, but they are also screams. Why, oh, why can't men be their honest selves and dress for the part, instead of attempting to ape some motion-picture star?"

"I don't know why men'll do such things," replied Buck; then he began coughing with such violence he ran into the kitchen and slammed the door. He grabbed the hem of the parka and pulled it up about his waist, fumbled in his pocket, and brought forth a ring. As she came into the kitchen he pulled the parka down, hiding what was beneath. Real concern changed to relief as she saw the fit of coughing was over. "As I was saying," Buck continued, "Windy and White-vest are plumb crazy to buy clothes like that for this country." He gulped down this, then caught both hands. "Molly, this is no motion-picture romance. This is the real thing. I've got a mine that's paying good, and I want you!"

He planned to say some more but forgot just what it was. Anyway, this was the real thing. He lifted Molly's finger and slipped on the ring. Then he

kissed her, taking acceptance for granted. Perhaps she did, too, for she snuggled close to Long John's smelly old parka for some seconds before she realized the odor. Then she laughed.

"Whatcha laughing at, dear?" whispered Buck.

"I was thinking how silly those big, husky miners looked in their dude clothes," she answered.

"Plumb crazy, both of 'em," Buck agreed.

Another moment of bliss, then: "Buck, take off that parka. You'll roast to death here in the house!"

Buck's heart skipped a beat. "Nope," he said gently, but firmly, "I don't think I'd better. I had a chill to-day, I'm none too warm right now, and, besides, I'm in a hurry."

In the movies the hero was never in a hurry to leave. In fact, the heroine had a difficult time to get rid of him. No wonder Molly lifted her brows. "Business matter," muttered Buck, "but it won't take long, and I'll be right back."

Then Buck hurried away, gripping Long John's parka on either side to prevent it from hiking up and disclosing the golf socks beneath. As darkness descended Buck slipped from his cabin and cut a hole in the river ice. He shoved a coat, kickers, one pair of socks with black diamonds knitted thereon, and a pair of loud shoes beneath the sheet. The black waters beneath whisked them away. Buck straightened up and looked at the stars. He was dressed in parka and moccasins, the garb of his calling. There in the darkness he smiled at the flash of the northern lights.

"Just like love," he whispered to himself, "all bright and beautiful. Well, guess I'd better go see how Molly's getting along." As he turned, the hole glazed over and began to thicken.

Presently he knocked at the door, and Molly greeted him with a kiss. "Won't you take off that parka, now?" she inquired.

"Don't care if I do. It seems like I've shook off that chill."

ALFALFA BILL'S COLONISTS GIVE UP

SOME time ago "Alfalfa Bill" Murray of Oklahoma, a former congressman of that State, promoted a scheme to take out a colony of seventy-five Oklahoma families to settle on land in Bolivia, in South America. The Bolivian government made a grant of land to Alfalfa Bill, but it turned out to be arid and unprofitable, and the colonization scheme proved a failure. All the families except two remained with Murray, and these two stayed only because they had no funds with which to leave.

NORTH STAR MINE PLANS DEEPER SHAFT

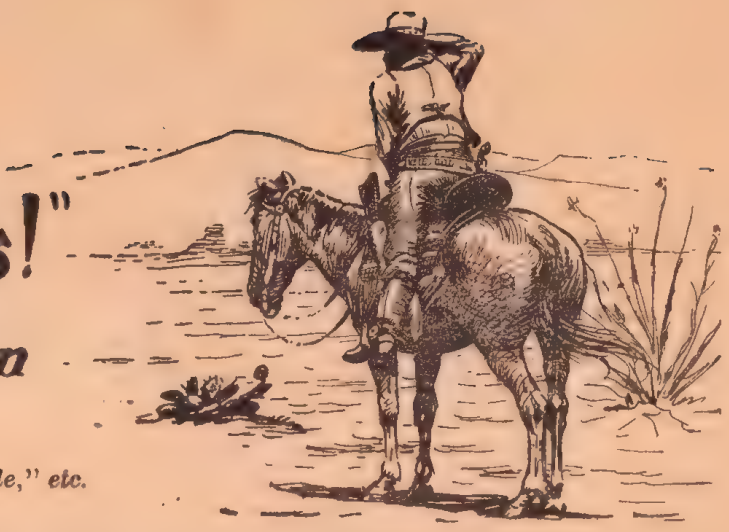
ACCORDING to dispatches from Grass Valley, Nevada, a contract has recently been awarded for the sinking of the sixteen-hundred vertical shaft of the North Star mine to a depth of an additional twenty-two hundred feet. Thomas Gill, mining contractor, has charge of the job and is already at work on it. Simultaneously two winzes will be sunk on the ledge from the four-thousand level to intersect the deep shaft. Explorations in the winzes have revealed good ore bodies. The work will take eighteen months and will cost over five hundred thousand dollars.

"Get Jimps!"

By

Arthur Preston Hankins

Author of "The Lucky Bug Lode," etc.



Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

LIMPY JIMPS, sheriff of Caldera County, discovers that decoy advertisements from the Laub Employment Agency in Los Angeles are related to mysterious murders in the desert.

The rival town of Mazorca is out to "get Jimps" with Mate Cox at the head. He is also the head of a gang of questionable characters with whom he has just made a raid on Heroina. Limpy trails them, but the gang is headed off safely by Squinty Laub, who has fled to the desert. Arriving at the same time as Laub does is an effeminate young scientist, Lincoln Highfall.

On the trail of Squinty, Limpy is trapped in the caves with Highfall and Tom Barlow, the latter's guide, by Mate Cox and Gannister. They want Highfall to send for ransom money. They want to "get Jimps."

Janice Trinity, daughter of Brickbat, the contractor and friend of the trapped men, persuades an old prospector to help her search for Limpy. Just as she nears the caves, the old man is killed by a bullet from Cox's gun.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THIRST.

UP in the maze of passages which represented the cave in the pink-and-yellow butte, Limpy Jimps and Lincoln Highfall had been undergoing the hardest period of their lives. They had been unable entirely to find the supposed western entrance to the cave. There were so many passages, all about alike, that they seemed to be winding about in circles, even as they had done when Tom Barlow had been with them.

The dog's unfathomable sense of direction could be relied upon to lead them to the eastern entrance whenever they wished to go there. For, as hunger and thirst began to torture the animal, he made repeated efforts to coax the two men to the entrance that he knew. Like Lincoln and Limpy Jimps, he knew nothing of the other mouth.

The two still considered it unwise to make marks on the stone walls which might help them to keep from circling here and there. At any time Cox and his gang might consider it advisable to come into the cave and put a quick end to the situation.

The third night had come. They had had nothing at all to eat since their imprisonment, and the last of the water had been drunk two days before.

They had given up trying to find the western entrance, if one existed. They were now keeping within the cave, close to the mouth with which they were familiar. If Cox and his men came up, they believed that, partially knowing the cave as they did, they would give them a warm reception. Evidently Cox realized this, too, for he seemed content to continue his slow siege rather than to climb the trail and start a fight.

Highfall presented a dejected figure, indeed. He had found no signs of prehistoric occupancy of the cave; he was weak from lack of nourishment, and his brain was filled with those strange imaginings which come when man's body is denied its customary sustenance. Worse than all, as was also the case with Jimps, he was suffering acutely from want of water. Lincoln did not complain. A man of his character would have scorned to whimper in the presence of a man like Limpy Jimps.

The sheriff kept amazingly cheerful, though his lips were swollen, and his voice husky. They had been sitting together perhaps a hundred feet from the mouth. Both now were gazing into the blackness before them. Night had come, and the little light that had been trickling down the rocky passage before them had gone.

Suddenly Jimps said, "I've been thinkin', Link, that, unless my sense of time has kicked over the traces, it got dark mighty early to-night."

Highfall gulped several times and ran his tongue over the shark's-hide interior of his mouth before he was able to make reply.

"I was thinking much the same thing," he said. "We don't want the battery in the flash light to run out; but hadn't I better shoot the light and see what my watch says about it?"

"Do it," ordered Limpy shortly.

The light flashed, and the rocky walls stood out, bold and grim.

"It's only half past six," the ethnographer reported. "Too early for the sun to be entirely gone. What's the answer, Limpy?"

"I hate to raise false hopes in your tender breast, Link," answered the sheriff, "but this is the time o' year when it rains. If only it comes, boy—the rain—we can hold out a little longer. But we'll have to kill the dog and eat him to-morrow, at the latest."

Highfall shuddered. "It's not that I'm so terribly averse to eating dog meat in a situation like this," he said, "but the poor little devil came to me, begging me to save his life, and—and—well, just confound it all, anyway! You know!"

"Sure—I understand," Limpy Jimps returned. "I love animals as much as you do, Link—but if there ever was a case of the survival of the fittest, this is it. This dog is skin and bones. He hasn't the meat of a good-sized jack rabbit on his framework. But—oh, well, we'll forget it for the present, as we've been doin' for days that have seemed like months. The longer we postpone it, the longer we can hold out, I reckon. I'm goin' to sneak out and have a look at the sky."

He rose to his feet.

"Tell you what I'd like to do most, Mr. Lincoln Highfall of Chicago: I'd like to slip down that trail about this time of the evenin', when you can't see any too well, and have it out in a gun fight with Cox and Gannister."

"No, not yet," said Highfall. "Limpy, there is something I didn't tell you. I saw it when I was out this afternoon, and you were in the cave."

"Yes? What now?"

"I crawled to the edge and looked down."

"And you saw—what?"

"Two more men with Cox and Gannister. Barlow wasn't one of them. I didn't see him; I think he's gone."

"Very likely. Guess the other two were Cyclone Kackley and Red Imboden. That means that the western entrance is a fake, and that——"

"No, Kackley wasn't one of the two. I don't know Imboden. One of the new ones I had never seen before. But the other——"

"Yes, shoot it!"

"He was the man, Whistler, that I drove with from Rafferty to Heroina."

"*Squinty Laub!*" cried Jimps.

"Well, if you're right as to Whistler

being Squinty Laub, it was he and no other."

"Now I do want to go down! I've got something on Laub. Nothing on Cox. But——"

"Remember, Limpy, that if you take this great hazzard, and fail, that I will be left to the mercy of this gang."

"Oh, the devil!"

"I know," said Lincoln softly. "I just thought I'd remind you. I'm not indulging in self-pity and whining for you to stick by me. But reminding you of that seems the only thing I can do to prevent you from committing suicide."

"But, Link, I've got to make the break some time. I won't stay here and starve and go crazy for water. It's on the cards for me to limp down a-shootin' before many more hours have passed through the countin' chute. I might as well try to make it while my shootin' hand is steady, and my eye is clear."

"Go see if the sky looks like rain," said Highfall. "If we can get water we can hold out a long time, Limpy. People have gone for over forty days with almost nothing to eat and lived to tell about it."

Limpy Jimps grunted and, feeling his way along the right-hand wall of the passage, walked slowly toward the entrance.

A few minutes later his voice rang huskily down the grim corridors.

"Link, for the Lord's sake, come out! It's rainin', and I'm catchin' it in my hat!"

Highfall needed no further urging. With a hoarse cry of yearning for the precious fluid, he scrambled to his feet and staggered after his fellow prisoner.

He found Limpy Jimps sucking the rocks of the butte's face, where the water trickled down in a tiny stream. Next instant he had found a similar stream of his own and flattened his body against the stones while the cold, life-giving rain soothed his dry, parched mouth and throat, and trickled on downward till he felt new vigor stealing over him as if the moisture were some potent drug.

Minute after minute they stood there in the pouring rain. Limpy's four-quart Stetson was filling slowly, but Lincoln had not yet taken time to place his own under a drip. It seemed that he never wanted to leave that rocky face, over a tiny crevice of which his lips were clamped.

Eventually they were sufficiently revived to give thought to the future. Finding another drip, they placed the new big Stetson that the Easterner had bought beneath it. Then they sought their crevices again and drank more and more.

Entering their systems in such meager quantities, the water could not hurt them. This was far better than if they had unexpectedly discovered a secret flow of large dimensions, for then they might have gulped it down in their frenzy, doing themselves great harm.

The yellow dog had followed his new master, and, though it was too dark for Lincoln to see, he knew that he must be lapping up the fallen rain from some floor crevice in the rocks. It had not been raining long, for there were places on the rocky face that still were dry. The rain had started, as it frequently does in the Southwest, in a sudden, tremendous downpour.

"Now," said Limpy Jimps, the rasp gone from his tones, "we got to use that electric torch, Link, and find some deep cups in the rock floor inside the cave. We can fill our hats again and again and carry the water in and pour it into these cups. It won't evaporate much in the coolness of the cave. If it keeps on pouring for any length of time we can put away a supply big enough to last us for a long time."

They went to work at this, first searching with their hands along the face of the butte for larger rivulets

than they had so far discovered. When they found two large streams, it was surprising how fast the big hats filled. They carried them, full, into the cave at the same time and emptied them into depressions in the floor, in order to conserve the battery in the electric torch.

For more than two hours they worked at this, and then the rain ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The captives estimated that they had the equal of three tubsfull when their work was stopped.

"Fine and elegant!" Limpy applauded their efforts. "We can hold out a long time on that, old mud in the face! And, as you say, we can go a long time without grub."

"Right you are, old flap-ears!" retorted Highfall. "We're new men already. I just know I am, for I never called a man old flap-ears in my life before."

They laughed and crowed like two kids who have suddenly discovered some boyhood treasure, like a rabbit in a hollow tree, or a bird's nest difficult to find. The little yellow dog frolicked about Lincoln's knees to show that he, too, realized that at least a temporary victory had come to them.

"And now," said Limpy, as they seated themselves in the darkness beside one of their precious pools, "about this Whistler, or Laub, down there."

"Yes, what about him?"

"I've been thinkin'," said Limpy, "do it often, when my inner man feels comfortable like it does right now. I know why Laub is here."

"Yes?"

"It's been stormin' before this up in the mountains, Link. Those birds down there saw the storm over the peaks before she hit the desert. They knew it was time to get busy at drivin' out the cattle, for winter comes mighty sudden up there. What is rain here may be a big snowstorm up above."

"I don't see yet—quite."

"It's just that Mate Cox had to get busy at roundin' up his stock in the mountains and drivin' 'em down to the winter range. I knocked out two of his vaqueros. It takes several to keep us put up here, which shows we're of some importance. Every available man was needed for the round-up. As Squinty Laub is no good on a horse, perhaps he was sent over here to take the place of a real man in watchin' us."

"I understand."

"It means, too, Link, that he'll likely be left here on this job. And that better men will have to get into the bumps pronto to handle the critters. Ten to one, Link, by to-morrow we'll have only Baldy Gannister and this Laub to deal with; and if I can't win out in a smoke festival with those two, my name ain't Jimps. Boy, I'm a-r'arin' to go, now that I've had something to drink!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DEAD MAN'S CACHE.

AS she ran blindly through the rain in the direction of the buttes, Janice Trinity knew that the man who had killed Henry Braman was after her. Shortly after she had started running, she heard the *slosh-slosh* of his footfalls, as he unexpectedly plunged into a depression in the sand in which rain water was standing.

She was the swifter runner. At college she had gone in heavily for all forms of athletics, and running was one of her specialties. Mate Cox, perhaps, had not run much since his twenty-first birthday, which date lay far behind him. Cattlemen are usually clumsy on their feet.

Lightning flashed now and then. During one spurt of white brilliancy another shot was fired at her, but Cox was now far in her rear, and it would be a miracle if a bullet from his Winchester should find its mark.

The girl was by now within the

cluster of enormous rocks that lay at the base of the butte. These rocks covered a wide expanse of ground. In ages past they had tumbled down from the lofty summits above them. In size they ranged from that of a washtub to the dimensions of a house. No better hiding place could she have wished.

She changed course often after she had entered the rocks, twisted about along the corridors between them, making always toward the south.

At last she came to rest and lowered her dripping slicker, the skirts of which she had held up while she ran. She leaned against one of the huge stones and listened breathlessly. The only sound was the constant beat of the rain on all sides of her.

She was more horrified at what had happened out there on the desert than over her own predicament. Her horse was gone; her companion had been murdered. She had nothing to eat, for the small supply that they had brought along was tied behind the cantle of her saddle. She was armed, it was true, with a .38 Colt revolver, which she usually carried when riding over the desert, but she was not much of a shot, and realized it fully. Even had she been an expert with the weapon, Mate Cox carried a Winchester rifle. There is no comparison between the two firearms for long-distance shooting.

Janice felt that she was safe for the night, at any rate. Cox would never be able to find her, now that she had succeeded in hiding among the huge stones. But when daylight came—she shuddered to think of it.

Why was Mate Cox here, hiding in the storm, with his rifle ready to fire upon the first person who came along? Limpy Jimps was here, somewhere, too—or had been. *Or had been!* She shuddered violently again.

If Cox had killed Limpy, why did he still remain in the vicinity of his crime? There was some hope in this thought. Was he still hunting for the sheriff? What did it all mean, anyway? She drove these thoughts determinedly from her mind. She had her own safety to think of now. She must place as much distance as possible between herself and the point where she had last seen Cox. She had the coming morning to think about.

All that she had to do to accomplish this was to keep close to the side of the lofty butte and work southward, hands before her when the sky was darkest to prevent her from crashing into one of the Gargantuan stones. She began walking slowly and cautiously, getting her bearings now and then when lightning flashed.

She met with several mishaps in this process—stumbled and fell twice. Yet she continued to make southward along the cliff, wondering if Mate Cox had entered the rocks in search of her. If he wanted her—which seemed to be the case—he would wait for daylight to seek for her. He knew that, afoot and hampered by the storm, she could not travel far and that he would be quite able to trail her very easily on his horse.

Janice knew that he had a horse close by. He would never be out here afoot. If he wanted her! Of course, he wanted her. Hadn't she witnessed his cold-blooded shooting of Henry Braman?

This thought was not comforting. While ordinarily the desperado might not harm a woman, it was a different matter when that woman knew him to be a murderer.

There was some satisfaction, however, in this situation. Limpy Jimps had been hampered severely by reason of not "having anything on Mate Cox." Janice had something on him now—something that placed him in a class with Squinty Laub—something that would send him to the gallows. She had accomplished something, provided

she was permitted to live and tell the tale.

The night had advanced far when she decided that she had better rest. She believed that she had covered no great distance, for she had been obliged to wind in and out so much. But she was excessively weary after her long ride of the day and her brisk run. She had eaten nothing since noon; she was weak and hungry. Water she had in abundance since the rain, for depressions in the rocks held plenty of it. Yet she must rest and refresh herself for the stern ordeal of the morrow.

She groped about in the darkness until she found a flat stone which lay at the foot of a roundish boulder. Drawing her slicker up under her to protect herself from the moisture, she sat down on the flat stone, and leaned her back against the other one.

The sky was still overcast with clouds, though the downpour had long since ceased. She hoped that the clouds would not part and let the moon shine through, for, in that case, Cox might decide to renew the search for her. It seemed as though her only hope lay in the conviction that her white horse would race straight for the camp of Trinity, Weathermore & Weed. In that case a search would be immediately instituted. Yet what would a search avail?

She was more nearly worn out than she knew. Excitement had kept her up and going. Now that she had relaxed, sleep came quickly and without warning. Sitting there in the dampness, her back against the stone, her head resting on one shoulder, she slept soundly until the streaks of dawn awoke her.

Then she lifted her head, sat forward, blinking. Her day of terrors had begun. With a shiver she scrambled to her feet, to find herself facing a shoulder-high stone on which a crude circle had been chiseled.

Wonderingly she stared at it. Then a sudden thought came to her, and she hastened around to the other side. There was a large depression under the stone. In it, far under a protecting roof of solid rock, she found a black-powder can. It was Henry Braman's cache!

Search though she did, she found nothing save the powder can. She had hoped that the old man might have left some food which would not decay, but there was none. Inside the can was nothing but half a dozen sticks of dynamite, a coil of fuse, and a box of caps.

Could she use these to defend herself, she wondered, if Mate Cox succeeded in cornering her? She had read of dynamite playing a prominent part in similar predicaments. If Cox should chase her into hiding, for instance, thinking that she had nothing with which to protect herself but her small-caliber revolver, might she not use half a stick of dymanite to give him the surprise of his life—provided he lived to ponder over it?

The find had no great weight; she could carry it without seriously encumbering herself. She discarded the can, put the dynamite and caps into the great pockets of her slicker, and carried the coil of fuse in one hand.

Then, still working into the south and keeping within the stones, she hastened forward again.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HIDDEN TRAIL.

THE girl had not traveled far when, somewhere behind her, she heard the slosh of hoofs in the wet sand. She knew that she had left no trail since the night before, for she had picked her steps over the rock-strewn ground. But, while stumbling about when it was dark, she could not see to plant each footstep on a stone.

Undoubtedly, Cox, knowing that she

had fled in among the huge boulders, had followed her as soon as it was light enough for him to see. He had picked up her trail, made while the storm was on, and had followed it to her sleeping place. Now, knowing that the only place where she could conveniently hide herself was among the stones, he had continued on, hoping to see a footprint here and there to guide him.

She darted toward the west and, still watching her steps, ran in close to the sun-splashed face of the butte. She hid behind a stone, plucked a stick of dynamite from her pocket, determined to hurl it against some rock close to Cox if he should pass.

The chances were slight that it would not explode with the impact. Dynamite, unless a cap with a lighted fuse be attached to it, never seems to do what a person wishes it to. A fifty-pound blow is supposed to discharge it, but sometimes a terrific crash will not cause it to explode. At other times, the slightest tap will set it off.

Janice knew all this, for, brought up on the railroad grade as she had been, she had familiarized herself with every branch of the work when a little girl. She had used a striking hammer, drilled block holes, tamped them, crimped caps, and fired shots. The use of dynamite, and black powder, too, were no new things to her.

The feel of the cool, smooth stick in her hand gave her a certain confidence. Perhaps Cox didn't know so much about explosives as she did. In that event, she might be able to keep in hiding and out of the range of his weapons, and threaten him—by telling him she had dynamite and would throw it over the stone behind which she hid, unless he rode away.

It was a wild, exotic hope, born of terror. In throwing it in an arc over the stone, she could not aim. If it struck the ground instead of a stone, the chances were great that it would fail to explode. But she needed something to bolster up her courage. *Maybe* Cox would "fall for it."

She scarce dared to breathe as she stood there, her Colt in one hand, the stick of dynamite in the other. If only she had known they were so close behind her, she could have cut a piece of fuse, attached it and a cap to the explosive, and lighted the fuse. Then she could have hidden herself and shouted a warning to the oncoming man that death was sputtering in his path.

The hoof beats came on. She heard low voices, and for the first time realized that Mate Cox was not alone. She held her breath as the sounds came abreast the stone behind which she was hiding. She let it out slowly again through her white lips as the hoof beats passed on and died out in the distance.

The warmth of temporary safety returned to her. She would be prepared for them if they pressed her again. She took the time now to cut a piece of fuse, split one end with her penknife, crimp a cap over the other end with her strong white teeth, and poke a hole in the stick of dynamite with the handle of the knife to receive the cap. An investigation of her inner pockets showed that she had not lost the precious matches which every outland dweller carries, and that, thanks to the oilskin slicker, the matches were thoroughly dry.

By this time she was ready to sally forth and take the back trail toward the pass through the buttes and home. Home, she reasoned bitterly, was far away, and she could never reach it without succor. She could, however, flee from Cox's gang, and in the right direction. With her dangerous annihilator in her hand, she doubled back, picking her steps carefully as heretofore.

Escape was not so easy. She had traveled less than half a mile along the butte, which now shone pink and yellow

in the sun, when she heard voices directly ahead of her. These could scarcely be the voices of Cox and the man who had ridden south with him. The gang was larger than she had thought!

Again she was forced to the face of the butte. It reared itself up like the side of a tall stone house before her. To her consternation, she realized instantly that there were fewer loose stones in this locality than on ground just passed. Dodging fearfully around one of them, she saw ahead a thicket of greasewood of large proportions, growing at the base of the butte. If she could force her way through that——

She was at the task immediately. The branches of the bushes were stiff and stubborn, but she pushed desperately, sweeping them aside both ways, and at last was through.

There came a shout. A man had suddenly ridden into the open and doubtless saw the bushes moving. It was followed by a clatter of hoof beats, and another hoarse cry. In desperation, chilled to the heart with fear, Janice plunged on blindly and cleared herself of the bushes, thinking to find an unscalable wall before her face.

Instead, half-blinded though she was with fear, she found that she was on a narrow trail, the mouth of which the bushes effectually hid. It led upward to the left. She darted into it and began to climb furiously, for the trail was unbelievably steep.

There came another shout from just below. She glanced back and down. Her body was exposed. They had seen her—two men in cowboy costumes, who had halted their horses before the bush that she had found a passage through.

Out came a six-shooter. Out and up!

Janice had flattened herself on the solid rock trail, finding that a low parapet of stones shielded her in this position. Above her, only a short way, the trail plunged into a defile, with a protecting wall on the outer edge. Plainly it was a trail that had been carefully fashioned, with protection in mind, by the hand of man.

She crawled forward and upward like a lizard, her heavy slicker hampering her somewhat, the dynamite in her hand hampering her even more. Finally she reached the higher protecting wall that hid the trail from the desert. Through the bushes below her at least one of the men was crowding his way. She had given neither of them time to fire a shot before she dropped prone. She stood erect, gasped for breath, and staggered on and on toward the summit of the butte.

Suddenly she halted, turned about, fumbled for her box of matches, found it. With trembling fingers she lighted a match on the box, dropped the latter at her feet. She touched the match to the frayed end of the fuse. It began to snap and cast off darting sparks.

She lifted the stick of dynamite above her head, her eyes on the burning fuse.

Then she shouted down in a voice that had suddenly steadied: "I have a stick of dynamite in my hand. The fuse is lighted. The fuse is only three inches long. I know just when to throw it to save myself. You can't shoot me —I'm hidden. Do as you think best."

From below came hoarse, excited shouts. Then a voice, loud and clear in the desert morning:

"She's bluffin'. That's a clever kid. Go on!"

Janice kept her eyes glued to the snapping fuse. A moment—another—another!

Back went her arm, and the stick of dynamite described a semicircle through the air.

"Look out! Run!" came a shrill warning from below.

"Shucks!" came the retort. "It's only a stone she's flung! I tell ye she's bluff——"

A deafening explosion sent the echoes galloping along the rocky buttes, and Janice, grasping up her box of matches, turned and ran with all her might up the narrow trail.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO.

THE little yellow dog had been forbidden to go to the known mouth of the cave. It is one matter to forbid a dumb animal a thing and another to make him respect the prohibition.

The idea was that, if Cox and his gang should get a glimpse of the dog, they would be apprised of the fact that the besieged men had not resorted to slaughtering him for food. They then would be better able to estimate the length of time that the starving men could hold out against them. In brief, if they saw the dog, they would realize that the captives had not yet reached the point of desperation and killed him. If they did not see him, Limpy and Lincoln would still have them guessing.

Limpy Jimps wanted them to guess; he wanted them to become so undecided that, to end the matter one way or the other and be free to go about their other affairs, they would make an attempt to creep up the trail to see how things were going. Limpy believed that, within their stronghold, he could get the better of the entire gang.

So they were obliged to see that the Count of Monte Cristo, as Highfall had named the little cur, kept close to them. This was virtually easy during their waking hours; before they went to sleep they tied him with a strip of whang leather which the sheriff always carried in his pocket in case of need.

The dog, however, was convinced that relief lay beyond the mouth of the cave. He whined and cocked his head that way continually. Once Lincoln awoke from sleep to find him gnawing at the strip of whang. After that he and Limpy slept by turns, which they had long considered doing, anyway.

Exotic thoughts come to the mind of man when he is in a situation such as theirs, especially if his stomach is crying out for food. Life beyond that cave seemed to Jimps and Highfall to be strangely insignificant. The doings of the great world outside them became only a memory. It seemed that they two had lived in that cave for many years, and that their former existence in the haunts of men was only a remote remembrance.

They thought weird thoughts and said weird things to one another when they talked. The petty concealments of civilization seemed contemptible. When they spoke about themselves it was with a candor which neither would have shown at Heroina. They kept back nothing. They dwelt upon stern facts. They looked on life as it really is, untinctured with romance and fancy, an animal existence if the veneer of social intercourse be lifted.

"Link," said Limpy Jimps on the fifth day of their imprisonment, "if we ever get out of this alive, I want you to understand that you can't have Janice."

In any other situation Highfall perhaps would have retorted: "Who said that I wanted her?"

But Highfall studied for a long time, and then replied: "I didn't know that you loved her, Limpy."

"Neither did I," said the sheriff, "until the day I rode to the Double T in search of Squinty Laub. But when I saw you and Barlow ride up I got to thinkin' about you and her. She seemed to be so deeply interested in your science stuff. And anybody could see that you had taken a tumble for her. She was goin' to help you and all that, she had said. So, thinkin' about it sort of suddenly, I found out that I can't let you or any other man have her. Maybe it's pretty hard on you, Link, but I saw her first, you know."

Another long pause on Highfall's part. Then he said, "Do you believe that she reciprocates your love, Limpy—to use a stereotyped, story-book expression?" Highfall was not lisping now.

"I don't know," the sheriff answered. "You see, Link, not knowin' that I wanted her before that day, the matter has never come up between us. But we've been mighty good friends and pards. I know she likes me. I always, before that day, considered that I wasn't good enough for her. Well, I ain't had any occasion to change my opinion in that respect. But I've forgotten all that now. I ain't good enough for her, but I'm goin' to have her just the same. That's plumb selfish, ain't it?"

"It is, Limpy."

"Fair enough! Selfish I am, then. But I believe that there ain't a man livin' that's good enough for her, includin' you, old dog catcher. So why should I allow any other tramp to cut me out?"

"But, look here, Limpy—you wouldn't want to ruin her life? You couldn't be that selfish?"

"Could you?"

Another pause.

"I don't know," said Highfall at last, "that her life would be ruined if she married me."

"Prove it, old-timer."

"Well, my father has a fortune, which will be mine some day."

"Granted. What else?"

"I am a man of education. Janice is an eduacted girl."

"You're a man of education, I'll admit. But what about me bein' a man of education?"

"A man of education," said Lincoln, lisping, "wouldn't say, 'What about me bein' a man of education?'"

"You're speakin' of a man of education as you look at education, Link. And I can come right back with this: A man of education, as I look at education, wouldn't have left his new sixes and his new Winchester with his horse when he soared up here to investigate this cave."

This time Highfall's silence was longer. "I'll have to admit there's something in what you say, Limpy," he presently confessed. "I'm not so narrow-minded as to believe there doesn't exist more than one kind of education in this world. You're a good man, Limpy Jimps—an honorable man, a trustworthy man. I like you tremendously. I don't know that I've ever liked any man better. Plague take it, I know I haven't! But do you honestly think you could make Janice happy?"

"Could you?"

"You're evading."

It was Limpy's time to consider. "Perhaps I am," he admitted unreluctantly. "Well, then, I could come as near makin' her happy as you could, Link. She likes something that each of us has got. As for your money, her father has plenty of that. And it's always jarred me somewhat to think that Janice don't care so all-fired much for the yellow goldenrods of commerce.

"Besides, I'm goin' to make money when her father gets his big land scheme actually under way. I'm gonta clean up this wild and woolly desert for Brickbat Trinity so's we'll have a decent, prosperous agricultural community out here. When that's accomplished, I'm to resign from the sheriff's office and let a man have it who doesn't have to be so rough as I've had to be.

"When that bright period arrives I'm to help Brickbat Trinity with his land project. I'll make enough money, so far as that goes, to keep Janice in comfort. I doubt if she wants much more."

"Don't be too sure of that," Highfall warned.

To this Limpy Jimps paid no heed. "In my mind," he continued, "that settles the money end of it. And as con-

cerns education, I'm sure that Janice has as much respect for my brand as she has for yours.

"And listen here, pardner: When it comes right down to tacks, I'm not so confoundedly ignorant, after all. I've never had a college education, I'll admit. But I've been through the common schools, and I know about as much along those lines as the ordinary man does. I've traveled a lot—as a tramp, maybe—but I arrived at places and saw things. All that is education. I've drifted into crude methods of speech, I suppose, and have crude mannerisms. But those things don't amount to much.

"The big point, Link, is this: Janice loves an outdoor life. She has been raised to it, and nothing else will content her. You take her off to some city and feed her up on society, and she'll mighty soon be hankerin' for the sagebrush plains and the rocky cañons—the old tin cow and the smell of flapjacks cookin' over a fire of greasewood roots when dawn is comin' on the desert!"

"If she married me," Highfall pointed out, "she would get a touch of both. I don't intend to spend my entire life in cities, Limpy. I mean to live in all sorts of out-of-the-way places —wherever my scientific investigations take me. Janice may go along, or she may remain at home in comfort. She will probably decide to vary her life by taking her choice, as her fancy dictates. Thus to live with me won't become irksome. There will always be a chance to relieve the monotony."

"Spoken like a man!" exclaimed Limpy Jimps, laughing. "And there's sense to your argument. But Janice, you must remember, is of the West—if you know what I mean. She was born and raised in the West, where men are men, and all that sort of stuff. And there's more truth than poetry in that much-laughed-at expression.

"You'll be goin' into the jungles of Africa, maybe, or to South America for exploration of the Andes and the upper Amazon. I've been to both of them, Link, and to many other remote corners of the world. My argument is that Janice wants the outdoor West for hers, first, last, and all the time.

"She'd rather ride a broncho than a llama or an elephant. She'd rather see pearl-gray Stetsons on men's heads than fuzzy topknots with men's bones stuck in 'em for ornaments. Only on the desert or the plains, or in the mountains of the West, will she find satisfaction in life. I know that. And I know that I'm the only dyed-in-the-wool Westerner that's got a chance to win her. Therefore I come nearer to bein' the man for her than anybody else alive."

"Well," said Highfall, "all that we can do in the matter is to wait and see. But it's just as well that we have spoken on the subject so frankly. We know, at least, that we are rivals and——"

"But what's the use, Limpy?" he broke off suddenly. "It looks as if both of us were doomed to pass out together in this gloomy cave. Let's forget it for the present, and—Mercy"—he resorted to his quaint lisp again—"hear that? The Count of Monte Cristo has gained his liberty while we were deep in our silly argument. He was right beside me a minute or two ago."

Limpy Jimps gave ear. From some remote inner recess of the cave came the dog's frantic barking. But it came from far away, for the sounds were barely audible.

"He's gone farther in," said Highfall, lisping fatuously. "He couldn't get past me to make another try for the entrance, so he's gone on a tour of investigation."

"Seems to me," drawled Limpy, "that his investigations haven't been entirely a water haul, from the way he's tellin' the world about it. So far as I've seen, there's nothing in the cave curious enough to make a dog yelp but you."

"Can it be possible that he has found the eastern entrance, Limpy?" Highfall said, ignoring his companion's levity.

"We can at least go to him, if he keeps on yelpin', and see," answered the sheriff of Caldera County, rising shakily to his feet. "Maybe he's really and truly found a hot-dog stand. That would be very nice—eh, old rubber string?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WALLED OASIS.

WHAT had been the result of the explosion of the stick of dynamite Janice Trinity had no way of knowing. Neither was she aware whether it had exploded in the air above the heads of her persecutors, or on the ground at the foot of the trail. Down deep in her heart she hoped that she had not killed any one, not even a member of the detested Cox gang. What she did know was that the pursuit had been stopped, for nobody followed her up the trail.

She had reached the top of it now, and found herself confronted by the black mouth of an opening in the side of the butte. Vaguely she wondered if this might not be one of the caves that Lincoln Highfall and she had planned to seek and explore.

All the way up the trail she had been shielded from her enemies on the desert by a rock parapet. Excited though she was, she had found time to marvel at this. The parapet was composed of huge stones that must have required many sturdy hands and shoulders to move in place. These had been cemented together with some reddish substance. The greater part of this had fallen off, however, exposing large crevices. Here and there, too, the six-foot wall had broken down. Some of the wall's units stood in her path and had to be surmounted; others, she supposed, had crashed down on the desert below in ages past.

Before the mouth of the cave was a sizable level place, walled as was the trail. Beyond a doubt all this work had been done as a defensive measure. Despite the gravity of her predicament, she found herself speculating over the possibilities before her. If she had not stumbled upon the caves that Lincoln Highfall was seeking, she at least had found an example of the workmanship of early-day dwellers in that desert land.

Breathing hard from her severe exertion, she stepped to the stone parapet, climbed up a way, and strove to look down upon the desert. She was unable to see anything without exposing her person; so she merely stood and listened for the voices of her trailers.

She heard them presently, but they were so far below her that she was unable to distinguish any words. She did not know, either, whether they were the voices of the men at whom she had thrown the dynamite, or the voices of Cox and his companion, who might have ridden back when they heard the deafening explosion.

She now gave her attention to the dynamite. There were five sticks left. Her experience told her that she could defend herself as well with fourth sticks as with whole sticks, and that by quartering her supply her ammunition would be quadrupled.

She seated herself on the ground in a position where she could see anybody coming up the trail. With her penknife she cut each stick in four pieces, cut the fuse into dangerously short lengths, crimped caps with her teeth, and generally made ready for her defense.

This concluded, with no one following her up the trail, curiosity took the place of terror and she decided upon a brief investigation of the cave. She carried her supply of dynamite a short

way beyond the mouth, where she hid it, all but two sticks, in a crevice of the rocks. Then, six-shooter in hand, and the two sticks of dynamite in her pocket, she started forward into the gloomy interior, lighting matches as she went.

She wondered, as she pressed on slowly, how many people knew of the existence of this cave. The dense bushes that grew immediately in the foot of the trail that led to the entrance might have screened the trail for years. Looking up at the face of the butte form the desert, the stone parapet showed not at all in contrast to the rest of the colored rock surface.

Her foot struck something presently, something that was not so heavy as a stone, something that rolled rattlingly over the stone floor at the gentle impact. She bent forward, burning match above her head, to examine it.

A sharp little cry escaped her as she found herself gazing into the empty sockets of a human skull.

Such a thing could not frighten Janice Trinity; and, confident that she had inadvertently discovered Highfall's longed-for cave, she stepped on, deploring the necessity of burning precious matches, but too deeply fascinated with the new quest to quit it then.

The cave was like a tunnel, many of which the girl had been in when her father was driving through hills of rock in building railroad grades. The silence, the coolness, the unearthly remoteness did not cause this girl to shrink.

Now and then she came upon branches, lateral tunnels that broke off to left and right. But she kept to the main one, often striking human skulls and bones with her feet, until a sharp right turn confronted her.

She glanced back, but could not see the lighted entrance. The tunnel did not run in a straight line from the mouth, but this she had not noticed. She hesitated a moment, then bravely made the right turn and continued her exploration. She thought often of the men below as she walked cautiously on, but, so deep was her interest in her discovery, she refused to be assailed by fears. The dynamite had showed them that to try to follow her and capture her meant certain death. They would not attempt to come up that trail till night had fallen, anyway.

She was desperately hungry, too, and growing thirsty also, but, for the present, these discomforts did not matter. She was going to find out all she could about that cave before her dwindling supply of matches should force her to quit in order to conserve it.

She had not traveled far after making the bend when, quite suddenly, light struck her eyes. This was surprising, indeed. She knew that she hadn't had time to go back to the eastern side of the butte, even if the turn that she had made had completed a full half-circle—and she was certain that it had not. She could not possibly have walked entirely through the butte and come upon an entrance on the western side, for she had taken not over two hundred steps since entering the cave.

She hastened forward toward the light, rimmed about by an irregular circle of black. Lighter and lighter grew the grim walls as she progressed.

Then suddenly she came out in the open, and found herself on a narrow rock shelf before a second mouth of the cave.

She took a step to the edge of the shelf, and drew back in alarm. Below her dropped a sheer precipice for three hundred feet, down to the very level of the desert outside she believed.

Overcoming a slight attack of vertigo, she screwed up her courage, lay flat on her face, and crept to the edge again.

Below her lay a circular sink in the very heart of the pink-and-yellow butte. It was walled about on all sides by solid

rock, that towered to at least a hundred feet above the level of the cave. The pink-and-yellow butte, then, was merely a hollow shell; but travelers over the desert on either side of it would never have guessed it from looking at its ragged outline against the sky.

Yet it did not look as if this gigantic, reamed-out rock which was the butte was of volcanic formation. It was not similar to an extinct volcano, for Janice had been in Hawaii and looked down inside Diamond Head. Furthermore the rock was not like lava in any way, having more of a sandstone nature.

She saw green trees on the floor of the sink. That grim rock shell guarded a secret oasis in the heart of the blistering desert! The floor seemed level, for the most part, and other greenery appeared besides the foliage of the trees. Then, in the wall opposite, she saw stone and adobe structures, crumbling into decay, but unmistakably once the habitations of men. They were huge and plastered into great niches in the rocky wall until they looked to be a part of it.

Trembling with triumph, she realized that she had found what she considered a great discovery, as she looked for a passage down into the sink. There must be water down there, for everything looked so luxuriantly green in comparison with the dry, yellow desert outside. Where there was water, too, there must be vegetable food, at least. Perhaps berries—something of the kind.

She backed away from her dizzy observation point and looked about more closely. There should be a trail leading down from the shelf on which she stood, but she was unable to find one. The shelf was not more than thirty feet by thirty in size, and a portion of it at least had been built by hand. But on all sides she discovered no path; the precipice dropped perpendicular at every point of investigation.

She sat down, thinking deeply. There seemed to be but one answer to this riddle. The ancient people who had made this spot the scene of their daily endeavors had reached the bottom of the sink by some inside passage that led down through the solid rock.

With this in mind she rose quickly and reëntered the cave. She would find that passage. It must be close to the mouth.

Though she searched and searched for an opening leading downward through the floor, she found no indications of one whatever. Bitterly disappointed, she gave it up and seated herself in the darkness, for she had wandered some way in search of the imaginary passageway.

This, it seemed, was to be the end of it. She must now give up thoughts of this wonderful discovery, continue to go hungry and thirsty, and let her mind dwell upon the difficult situation that she was in.

What should she do, anyway? Should she go back to the other entrance and try to make peace with Cox? Did she dare do that, when he perhaps knew that she was a witness to his willful killing of Henry Braman? She was desperately afraid of Mate Cox, the terror of the desert. No, she decided that to make peace with him was impossible. He wouldn't play square. He might promise, and then, when she had gone down to him, laugh in her face at her gullibility.

Janice felt a strange choke coming in her throat, felt her lips puckering despite her efforts at calmness. Then the storm broke suddenly, and, weak and nervous from hunger and ordeal, her face was bathed in a flood of tears.

She sobbed brokenly, hysterically, unable to control herself. Louder and louder her gulping sobs became, until she began to fear that she would strangle, for the breath of life seemed to be denied her.

Suddenly she ceased. The muscles of her throat ached painfully still, but fright had stopped her hysterical outburst where will power had failed. In a moment when she had been gasping for breath, and her sobs were not so loud, there had come to her ears, from farther within the cave, a series of strange, tinkling sounds that surely chilled her heart anew with a terrible sort of fright.

Her lips parted and she sat staring into the darkness straight before her. She could scarce believe her ears, but the far-off, mysterious sounds that she had heard, and was still hearing, were unmistakably the sharp yelps of a coyote or a dog.

To be concluded in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

OLD-TIMER'S LAST WISH HONORED

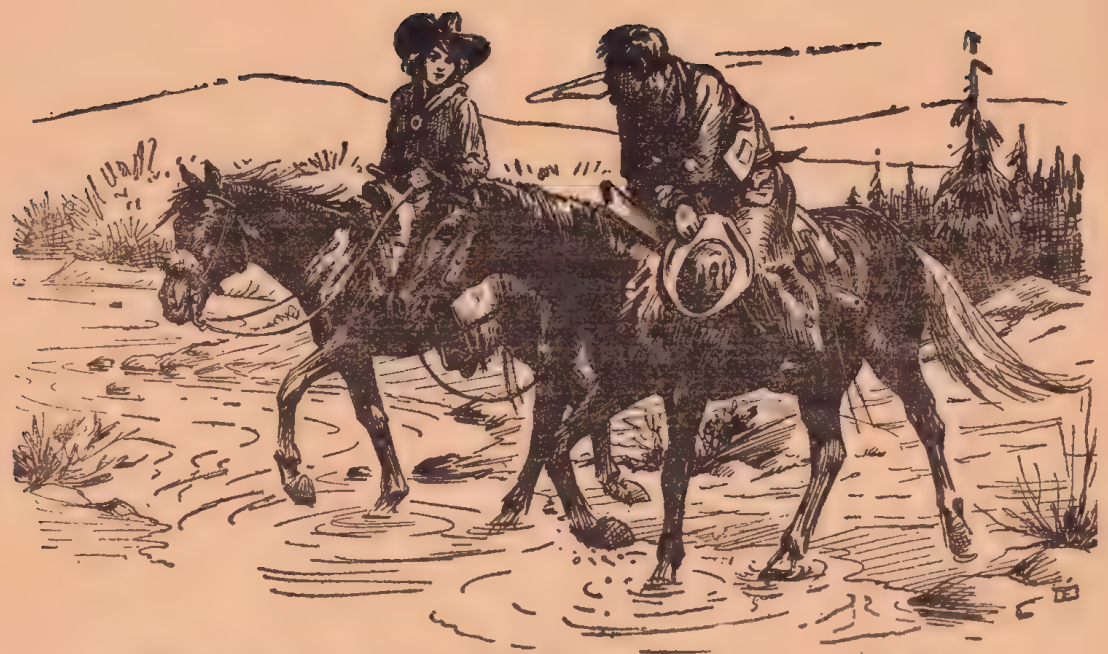
SHORTLY before his death at Idaho Springs, Colorado, on August 24, 1924, R. Brought, an old-time resident of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and other cities of the Southwest, expressed a wish that his ashes might be scattered over Camelback Mountain, near Phœnix, Arizona. Following Mr. Brought's death, his body was taken to Phœnix. There it was cremated, and one Sunday afternoon a few weeks ago, aviators scattered his ashes over Camelback Mountain, so as to carry out his last wish.

SKUNKS CAUSE RABIES EPIDEMIC

A NUMBER of Arizona communities have reported hydrophobia as prevalent among their dogs. This epidemic is believed to have been caused by rabid skunks biting the dogs. Orders have been issued in the Lehi Mesa and Miami sections to kill dogs running at large. In lower Miami, a rabid dog bit eleven persons before it was killed. Several cowboys while sleeping in the open have been bitten by rabid skunks. The Pasteur treatment was given in each case.

INDIAN UNEARTHS BURIED TREASURE

A BURIED treasure estimated at from fifty-five to sixty thousand dollars in gold was unearthed recently near Jay, Oklahoma, by Tom Wickliff, a full-blooded Cherokee Indian, while he was digging a trench for the foundation of his smokehouse. The property formerly belonged to a man named Miller, and it is thought that the gold may have been placed there prior to the Civil War. In the opinion of the local justice, Wickliff is entitled to full ownership of the treasure.



Peg Leg Fills the Jail

By F. R. Buckley

Author of "Peg Leg Gets Arrested," etc.

I WAS going to start this narrative wondering why folks afflicted with cock-eyed ideas of one kind or another, drift so surely and so unanimously into Three Pines County, of which, for the last forty years, I have had the honor to be sheriff. Sometimes I think quite seriously that some enemy of mine must spend his leisure going about the loonybins of the United States leaving circulars worded, "Are You Leaving Here? Then go to Beautiful Three Pines. Monomanias Welcomed. Delusions Accommodated. Call on Old Bill Garfield, the Fathead's Friend."

I say, I was going to start off like this, but on second thought I won't. After all, gratitude is not a recognized form of insanity—probably because genuine cases of it are so rare nowadays—and, though enormously exaggerated, it was nothing but gratitude that ailed young Wilkins and caused so much trouble in the district recently.

Of course he did—but no, I shall give him the benefit of the doubt for a wedding present, and get on with the statement of the case.

I was sitting on the porch of my "International Emporium and Sheriff's Office" one day of the week before last, whittling my peg leg with a jackknife and reading the article on snakes in my encyclopædia. Who should drive up to the front of the store, in the very wagon I have trailed so many miles by night without result, but Peter McDowell, from Prairie Dog! The aforesaid Peter, having put his whip back in its socket and taken the cigar out of his chops, addressed me as follows:

"What-ho, Mr. Garfield!"

In the interests of dignity, I stopped whittling my leg. I further put both my lower extremities on the porch rail-

ing instead of one as heretofore; I turned over a page and carefully pretended to be unaware of Mr. McDowell's presence.

He put the cigar in the other corner of his mouth, gave a mocking laugh to show he didn't care whether I spoke to him or not, and said: "Hey!"

After another short silence, he improved this to: "Hey—you!"

Then he shouted much louder, "Hey—you there on the porch! Mr. Garfield! Bill! 'Peg-leg!' Wake up!"

His next step would have been to become insulting, upon which I should have had an excuse to descend and deal with the unpleasant person severely. Before he could think up anything fruity enough to satisfy him, another voice broke into the conversation, saying feebly that it would like a drink of whisky.

Glancing up to see who could think it worth while to mention anything so obvious as that, I perceived that Mr. McDowell was not alone in the wagon, as I had thought at first. From over one of the sides there protruded the head of a young man, consisting of one very sick-looking face, two ears apparently blue with cold, and one mass of dark-brown hair which was visibly soaking wet.

"Hello!" I said in some surprise.

McDowell laid down the lines with a fake sigh. "There," he said, getting off the box, "I knew you weren't dead, Bill. Nothing good ever does happen on a Friday. I——"

"You'll know it still better, and something still worse'll happen this Friday," I replied, "unless you shut your trap and quickly get away from here."

He was about to protest, when the case was taken out of his hands. The passenger in the rear of the wagon heaved himself to his feet, held on to the supports of the tilt to keep himself from falling, and, shivering so violently that the knees of his bowlegs knocked together, undertook the defense.

"Mumumister Shushusheriff," he chattered, "you mumumustn't spuspeak tututo mumumy pupreserver thuthat way. He's a nununoble fufufellow. He pupulled me out of the ruriver when I'd gugugone dudown for the thuthird tutime, and I'm gugugrateful."

This was annoying—to have McDowell grow wings, just when I had him on toast, annoying for me, that is. As for him, he was grinning in my very face, which didn't serve to cool me any.

"What were you doing in the river?" I therefore inquired bitterly of the young stranger.

"Dududrowning," he replied with great simplicity. "Horse got in a cucucurrent, and——"

"Where?"

The young man's teeth were now glued together with frigidity, so McDowell answered.

"He'd tried to cross at Black Crow Gulch, Bill. And like he says, he'd gone down for the third time, when I——"

"He'd better have gone down again and made a job of it," said I. "If he's got no more sense than to ford rapids sixteen feet deep, he won't live long around these parts."

"No," said McDowell, looking from his salvage to me in a nasty, insulting manner, "I hear pneumonia does make a short job of 'em."

"He can come inside and be attended to," I said, "so long's he comes alone. If you feel you've got to come with him, I'll attend to you, too—in a different way."

"Bububut he sususaved my life!" cried the object in the wagon, "and I'm gugugrateful!"

"Well, you may be," I told him crossly. "I'm not. Now, you get down, and he can get out."

"You'd better," said McDowell, giv-

ing his head a twist that informed the patient I was always like that.

"Bububut I wuwant to sususee you again and thutthank you fufufor——"

"That's all right," said his savior. "I'm always around Prairie Dog. Nothin' to thank me for, though. Just done what I'd have done for anybody—even old Bill Garfield here. By the way, here's your wallet—fell outa your pocket when I was givin' you artificial perspiration. Four thousand nine hundred bucks in it. Is that right? Sorry I couldn't save your horse. Well, good-by."

"I'll shushow you I'm gugrateful!" howled the owner of forty-nine hundred iron men at the same time, as McDowell prepared to go.

That disgusting humbug—he would *not* have pulled me out of the water, and well he knew it—waved his hand as much as to say it was nothing, and departed.

"He's a fufufine fufufellow——"

"Take your clothes off," said I.

"It was by the huhuhair he cucaught——"

"Rub yourself with this towel. Hard."

"You susee, the pupupony slipped on a——"

"Drink this. All at one gulp. 'At's it."

"He——"

"Will you shut up?" I demanded finally, all fair means having failed. "Listen: Since I don't seem able to catch that guy at whatever it is he's doing that's illegal, the only thing I want to hear about him is that old 'Pa' Potter's plugged him for hangin' about after Winifred. Now, put your feet in here; it's a good job I had water hot, and there's enough mustard to make you think you're a beefsteak."

About three minutes were occupied in the patient's howling that he wouldn't be boiled alive, another three in my wrapping blankets around him; and after that, he returned to the attack as fresh as ever, fresher, in fact. The chatter had departed from his teeth, and the whisky—which I keep for medical purposes only—had entered into his main circulation.

"He's a fi' fellow," says this George Sylvester Wilkins, such being his name as marked on his expensive clothes. "He save' my life. He's a fi' fellow. Why don't this Winifred's father or whatever he is approve of hangin' round after the girl? He saved my life!"

"Yeah," says I, with some sarcasm, "but we must remember that this deed, though no doubt entitlin' him to the very shirts of all right-minded people, took but five minutes out of his thirty-two years. The balance of that period has been spent in various less praiseworthy ways—to wit, gambling, rustling, borrowing money with intent to forget to return it, and, since prohibition, driving a wagon about the county in the dead of night. I say no more on this last head, having no evidence, but——"

"It's a scan'lous shame," said Mr. Wilkins sleepily; then he woke up. "I know why he's picked on! I know why you think he's no good! He hasn't got any money! That's all that's the matter with the poo' fellow!"

I simply stared at the jasper. Me picking on a man because he was poor; whereas it is well known in the county that if such was my system, I should have to go to work first of all on myself—with a mattock.

"But nemmind!" said my patient, striving in vain to keep both eyes focused on me at the same time. "I'm grateful! I *am* grateful—*very* grateful! And what's more, I've come into money lately, and I'll *show* him I'm grateful!"

"Good," said I soothingly.

His eyes closed. "Potter!" said he with deep contempt.

"Yes, dearie," I agreed.

He now snored. "Show'm scorn feller that shaved my life."

He snored again. "I'm *grateful,*" he murmured at last; after which he buried his nose in all my blankets and slept fourteen hours and a half.

Having had plenty of folks grateful to me in my time and knowing the usual course of this emotion, I expected that when Mr. Wilkins awoke, he would have forgotten about ninety per cent of the intentions formed when he was still half drowned. That was just where this particular bloke was abnormal; he came to himself fuller of thanks and benefactions than ever. He said he was obliged to me and offered to pay for the mustard, which, if tactless, was refreshing after the way I'm sponged on around here. But it was clear to be seen that the guy his soul yearned after was Peter McDowell.

"Where are you off to?" I inquired, as Wilkins put on his dried clothes, and started for the great outdoors without even waiting for his coffee.

"To Prairie Dog," he said enthusiastically. "And, if my rescuer backs up what you said about his matrimonial affairs, I'm going from there to wherever this old fool of a Potter lives."

"But you haven't got a horse!"

"When I'm grateful, I can walk if necessary," replies the young man proudly, though judging by the shape of his legs he hadn't covered half a mile afoot since his birth. "How far is Prairie Dog, Mr. Garfield?"

"About six miles," I told him, "and from there to Potter's is another four."

That made him wince, but he stuck to the idea. Rather than have to go out hunting for him later on account of his having fallen by the roadside halfway to town, I sold him a pony that a bad man would have left me if he'd had time to make his will, and lent him Jake Henson's second-best saddle.

"Do you think," he inquired of me gravely as he tightened the cinches, "that this here Winifred is worthy of him?"

"What?" I asked, Winnie Potter being our outstanding local belle, not to mention something remarkable in the ways of a cook and an heiress.

"Do you think she'll make him a good wife?" demanded young Wilkins, straightening himself.

"Well, as to that, no."

"What's the matter with her?"

"It isn't so much what's the matter with her," said I, "as what will be the matter with McDowell, and you, too, after Pa Potter's expressed his views on your proposals. He uses buckshot, and his right barrel's full choke."

Wilkins surveyed me pityingly. "Ah!" said he, shaking his handsome young head as much as to say I didn't understand—a, his powers of persuasion—b, the strength of his gratitude—c, Peter McDowell's beautiful soul or —d, anything else. With this remark he started for Prairie Dog.

As for me, I hastened to the telephone to tell Pa Potter of the young man's lunacy, and bind him over to keep the peace, in which attempt I didn't succeed very well. It took me an hour and a half to get the connection, and when I did get it, the old man seemed unable to hear half my instructions, and disinclined to take any notice of the other half.

"All I got to say," he roared finally, "is that any bum that comes hangin' about here after my little gal, does so at his own risk."

"And all I've got to say is that if you shoot anybody with so much as a butterfly rifle while I'm sheriff of this county, you do so at your own risk!" I cried back.

"Whose did you think I'd do it at—yours?" answered Potter, and hung up.

I had to get out my poor, old, spavined Tony, to whom I'd absolutely

promised two days' rest, and go over there to the Circle P. There is nothing like the personal touch in an argument, provided you can arrive at the place thereof early enough, which, in this case, I didn't. It was a cool, clear, still, and silent night, and I was still a good half mile from the ranch house when I realized that I should have started sooner.

The affair had begun, it appears, with old Potter's shrieking "Whaaaat?" and running into the house for his shotgun; it had continued with Wilkins' tripping him up and falling on him; after that, an interval had been produced by Winifred's coming out and commencing to scream. When I arrived, the body of the entertainment consisted of the hammering of human heads on the board floor, Potter and Wilkins taking turns as the hammer.

I tried to bring the performance to a quick finale by yanking the opponents apart; far from permitting this, they very nearly dragged me into the affair. They would have succeeded had I not known that a third party always gets the worst punches of the other two, and firmly withdrawn myself by using of my peg leg.

"Who started this?" I demanded of Winnie Potter, as her dad and his guest resumed their battle.

"My father," said Winnie indignantly, "and I'm getting about tired of it, the way he chases—oh, dear, look what he's doing to the young man's *mouth!*"

"That's all right," I assured her, as young Wilkins did the obvious thing and bit Mr. Potter's thumb quite severely.

"He was as polite as could be, talking about crops and—and I just went in to put some coffee on, and when I came back—— He's dead! Dad's dead!"

"No," I said, snapping the handcuffs on the exhausted Potter; "he's merely arrested. Now, I warned you about this over the phone, didn't I? I told you you'd do this at your own risk?"

The old man sat upright. "What did you expect me to do when this galoot came here with a proposal like——"

"I said it was in confidence!" gasped out Wilkins.

Potter and he exchanged dark stares.

"Bind a guy to secrecy, and then come proposin' fool things like that about his daughter!" muttered the ranch owner, while both Wilkins and Winifred, glancing at each other in the lamplight, turned a kind of bright crimson. "Dog-gone impudent!"

"Dad!" said Winnie sternly.

"You'd say worse than that if you knew what he'd been sayin'!" replied old Potter. "It was about you, my girl, I'll say that much, confidence or no confidence!"

"I don't see how you take it on yourself to say whether I'd have—whether I'd have—that's just the trouble with you, dad; you seem to think I'm a child of three."

"And I suppose you're very glad to see me arrested for tryin' to protect you from——"

"Well," I broke in, "whether she's glad or whether she's not, Mr. Potter, arrested you are, and I'll thank you to arise and come with me. Family affairs or none, I'll not have my instructions to keep the peace disobeyed. Get him a clean pair of pajamas and a toothbrush, Winnie, my dear, and we'll be off."

"It serves you right, dad," said the girl regretfully.

"Very good, my girl," replied the old man, rolling his eyes, and we departed.

On the way over to Three Pines my prisoner became so violent that it was a question either of stunning him, or requesting young Wilkins, who accompanied us, to take some other route to Prairie Dog, where he was living. I did the latter and saw nothing further

of the young man for four days, during which time Pa Potter remained a prisoner in my store, awaiting the weekly visit of Judge Jennings. I did not put him in the tool shed because of his rheumatism, and also because he plays a nice hand of poker. He seemed, after an interview with his ranch foreman, who rode over the day after the arrest, to have something on his mind which amused him considerably, and I wanted to know what it was.

I learned on the fourth day at three thirty in the afternoon. In the middle of a game of cards, Pa Potter looked up at the clock, then at me, and finally chuckled.

"Smatter?" I asked, thinking he might have a royal flush.

"Why," he said, laying down his hand and stretching, "you know I told my foreman the other day to ride over to Laredo and tell my son Jimmy about this Wilkins friend of yours."

"What?"

"Yeah," said Potter with another chuckle. "It appears that in the intervals of phonin' to know whether I wanted to see her, an' bein' told 'no,' my undutiful daughter has been goin' out for rides with this young Wilkins. When they go out to-day, Jimmy'll meet 'em."

"You're on your word of honor not to escape," I said to the old man as I buckled on my gun belt.

"Why should I escape?" he asked. "What I'm goin' to do is stay right here and make a complaint to Judge Jennings——"

I heard no more, having left the store and vaulted on my poor, weary nag.

What a day! Still, I did have a bit of luck; it so happened that Wilkins and Winnie had chosen the Three Pines Trail to ride along, which they were doing with their heads so close together they might have saved the wear and tear on one saddle. I had a first-class view of the arrival and subsequent proceedings of Mr. James Potter.

One might put it that his arrival and the subsequent proceedings occurred simultaneously. He bolted up the trail behind his sister and Wilkins; he steered his horse so that it collided violently with Wilkins' nag. Without any remarks, he swung his right arm and caught Wilkins a perfectly lovely wallop on the jaw bone.

I never saw a clearer case of unprovoked assault—nor a neater series of replies to one. At the same moment that Wilkins' head jerked back, his right fist jerked forward and knocked young James Potter kicking off his horse. Before he could gather himself together and rise, Wilkins had dismounted. There was a brief flurry of arms and legs; by the time I reached the scene of action, the battle was over. Mr. Wilkins had a nasty cut on the forehead, and his shirt was open all the way down the front, not to mention that two of his teeth had left him. Jimmy Potter lay there in such a state of unconsciousness that I didn't even put him under arrest.

"Who's this guy?" demanded the victor as I rode up.

"It's—er—it seems to be my brother Jim," Winnie Potter answered apologetically.

In a way it was quite an embarrassing moment.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Wilkins, rearranging his clothes, "but—but what did he want to come and do this for?"

"I think perhaps he didn't want you to—er—talk to me about—er—what you were just going to talk to me about when he came up," answered the girl, blushing.

Wilkins also blushed, and they refrained from looking at each other.

"Well," I said, "whatever this here message was, it'll have to wait for another occasion, because I'm goin' to arrest this member of your family as

well, Miss Winnie, and he's comin' along with me right now. So is this young fellow to prefer a charge of assault. I'm not goin' to lose sight of him again."

"C-couldn't he ride over later?" asked the girl.

"No, he could not."

"It don't matter," said Wilkins in a heavy, reluctant voice. "It don't matter. You—you remember what I said the day before yesterday, Miss—Miss Winnie?"

"Yes," said the girl, looking at him eagerly, whereas he kept his eyes cast down.

"About—about a good man's lo——"

"Yes." She looked at me as if she wished I'd go away.

"Well," said Wilkins, "I've arranged —arranged for some one else to come and—tell you the rest. He'll be at the —at the ranch house waitin' when you get back."

"Somebody else?"

"Yeah. Perhaps it'd have been better if I'd had him do the talkin' from the beginnin'——"

"You've—you've done well enough," said the girl, getting redder and redder.

"Have I? Thanks," said Wilkins, looking at the ground and speaking like a funeral. "Well, good-by."

"Good-by," said Winnie.

"Good-by." Wilkins sighed, making no move.

They'd have been there yet, I guess, if I hadn't gone into the farewell business with a good-by that meant what it said.

She went back to the Circle P, and Jimmy, Wilkins and I proceeded to the store. I see no reason to harrow anybody by describing the greetings which took place between old Potter and young Jimmy—when the latter recovered consciousness—nor yet those between Potter and Jimmy and Wilkins when, having firmly handcuffed the father and son, I brought Wilkins into the emporium. I assure you the place, for some minutes, resembled a badly managed menagerie at feeding time, rather than a respectable place of business. The noise was such that the ink was positively vibrated off my pen, to make large blobs of blue-black on the charge book. This, by the way, was what the noise was about—Jimmy and old Potter wished to make similar large blobs of blue-black on Mr. Wilkins.

"You charge these persons——" I began, when Jimmy broke in.

"He can charge me with murder just as soon as I've bitten through this chain," said Potter, Junior.

"Me, too!" cried his pa. "Comin' and askin' me to marry my only child off to a bootlegger, eh?"

"He is not a bootlegger!"

"You lie like a coyote with four mouths," said old man Potter, wrenching at his bonds, "and four mouths you shall have as soon as I'm free. How much commission was he goin' to give you for boostin' him, you wall-eyed matrimonial agency, you?"

I could see Wilkins was keeping his sanity with a great effort. "I've explained to you once," said he, "that Peter McDowell saved my life——"

"That's worse than his other crimes!" cried Jimmy Potter. "I'll kill him, too, when I get out of this."

"And that when I learned he was in love with Miss Winnie, an' being scowled on by you-all because he was broke, gratitude——"

It was at this point, for the first time, that I perceived the four of us were not alone. The howlings of my two prisoners having died down for an instant, another voice broke into the conversation.

"Gratitude, eh?" was all it said. But what a tone! It was the voice of Peter McDowell, himself, who now walked into the room with the step of a cougar on short rations.

"Gratitude, eh?" he cried, sticking his

finger into Wilkins' face. "Gratitude, huh? You're goin' to fix everything up for me with my girl, and when I go to put the question to her, what does she do? She like to scratches my eyes out, you——"

His feelings overcame him at this moment; and he loosed a most vicious wallop for Mr. Wilkins' nose. His fist came in contact with my cash register as Wilkins stepped aside. I assure the reading public that the machine registered $237.10.

"But——" said the victim of all these attacks.

"But Tartarus!" cried McDowell, wringing his knuckles. "I'll show you 'but,' you dirty traitor!"

"I won't be called a traitor by any man," said Wilkins, going rather pale about the nose, "and what's more, if you use words like those others, you're not the man I took you for. All right, then, if you will——"

Nobody relishes being told he isn't the man somebody else took him for. Peter McDowell had shown his disapproval by an earnest attempt to kick Wilkins in the stomach; which attempt was frustrated by Wilkins' taking his ankle with the right hand, hitting him in the eye with the left, and throwing him bodily on top of old Potter and his son. From this uncomfortable couch the disappointed suitor arose more annoyed, if anything, than he had been before, which is saying a lot. He had the bad taste to pick up an empty ginger ale bottle with intent to commit mayhem. He would have committed it, too, James Potter having caught Mr. Wilkins' legs so as to prevent him from leaping to the attack.

At this moment—just as I got a grip of the stove poker at last, the doorway was obscured by another shadow; the voice of Winnie Potter was heard declaring in a hysterical manner that she would blow McDowell's head off if he moved his right hand an inch. In her own right hand, more or less backing up this promise, there gleamed a revolver of quite efficient caliber.

"I've been fooled with enough," said Miss Potter through her teeth. "You put that bottle down, Pete McDowell. Yes; and now you get out of this store, and out of this county, and don't you let me lay eyes on you again."

"I was thinking of arresting him for assault," I remarked.

Winnie looked at me in a scornful manner.

"You've arrested enough people, Bill Garfield," said she. "You get out of here, McDowell. I'm not joking with you."

I guess he could see that; anyhow, he went.

"But—but," said this poor ass of a Wilkins, "aren't you—aren't you—goin' to marry him?"

I don't wonder at her dropping the revolver on the floor after a foolish question like that.

"Why, it's his cause I've been pleadin' all along," said the grateful young idiot, "an'—an' I thought the idea of marriage kind of—appealed to you."

Winnie looked at him in silence for about two minutes, and then suddenly she burst into tears.

"Boo-hoo-hoo!" she wept, sort of staggering around to find a place to lean her head against. "Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

Wilkins gave a sort of choke and stepped forward. The girl had got her hands over her eyes, and wasn't paying attention to anything, it seemed. Yet, by some strange method, it was his shoulder her forehead rested against, rather than the door post, which was much nearer.

Of course it had to be exactly at this moment that that long-nosed old Judge Jennings, two days ahead of schedule, came shoving into the room.

"Why, what's this?" he demanded, peering about him. "What's all this?"

He listened to all the four of them had to say; and, not having had his four remaining gray hairs turned white by the business, the way I had, he seemed to find the whole affair rather amusing. When the narrative had come to an end, he sat on my counter and chuckled until old Potter and his son started to call him most evil names. Then he hammered for order, declared the court to be in session, and started to cross-examine the witnesses, Winnie and Wilkins.

"As I understand it," says he, "all this trouble's come to pass owing to your gratitude making you, Wilkins, conduct a love affair for a friend of yours, when, as a mater of fact, you had fallen in love with the lady in the case yourself, and she with you. Am I right?"

"Er——" began Wilkins, while Winnie sobbed on his shoulder and made no answer.

"Such being the case," said old Jennings, "it seems to me that two courses of action are open to me. I can either deal separately with the two cases of assault on the docket, and issue a bench warrant for the third prisoner, who appears to have escaped, or I can rectify the mistake which has led to all this by marrying you. I don't care which, but it's got to be one or the other. I'm not going to have ridden all the way over here for nothing."

"I refuse my consent!" said Pa Potter.

"So do I!" said his son.

"Then stand up and be committed for a year apiece," said Judge Jennings blandly.

They neither of them did.

"I don't need their consent, anyhow," whispered Winnie. "I'm twenty-two and a half."

"I'll disinherit you!" said old Potter.

"But since I've got about two hundred thousand dollars of my own," said Wilkins, "I don't think we shall starve to death, even so."

There was a slight silence, during which it was visible that old Potter was taken aback.

Jennings yawned. "Well," he said casually, "do you take this woman to be your wife, young feller?"

"You bet your life I do!"

"How about you, Winnie?"

"Yes!"

"All right," said Jennings, "then you've got each other, and I hope you'll be happy. Got anything to drink their healths in, Bill?"

There was silence while I poured it out; into the midst of which there suddenly burst the voice of young Wilkins, just trembling with real earnestness.

"Judge," said he, "of course this don't seem like anything to you, but believe me, I'm grateful! I'm so grateful that——"

It was not a thing to do to a man on his wedding day, but you've got to take the provocation into account. I spilled what I was pouring at the sound of that terrible word. When I asked him what he'd said, he went and repeated it.

"Ha?"

"I was just saying that I was grateful, Bill, and so I am. I'm very grateful, and——"

That was when I hit him over the knuckles with the stove poker.

RANCH OFFERED TO HOMESEEKERS

ONE of the latest large ranch properties in Texas to be offered to homeseekers in small tracts is the E. Carter ranch, near Hereford, Texas, running up to within one mile of the city limits. The entire property of two thousand acres will be sold in farms of 160 and 320 acres.

What Shorty Did

by

Ray Humphreys

Author of 'Shorty Goes Loco," etc.

THE sheriff of Monte Vista, Joe Cook, had just returned from a visit to Denver, where he had studied metropolitan police work at close range. He had come back home a convert to the importance of details in solving crime mysteries. Now, in the privacy of his own office, he was laying down the law to Deputy "Shorty" McKay.

"Shucks," said the sheriff, with an expressive gesture, "it's a wonder we ever caught that Mex sheep herder over to Conejos who killed his father-in-law —an' the same way in convictin' that bank robber to Lariat. It sure was a miracle, considerin' how crude we blundered along."

"Yes, sir!" agreed Shorty, just to be sociable.

"An' from now on," continued the sheriff, shaking a long finger in warning at his awed deputy, "we don't blunder. We schemes an' devises an' *deducts*—that's the idear—we *deducts*. And in order that we kin do it with reason, we gotta look fer the little things like they do in Denver—fer the details o' evidence—the hidden clues."

"Yes, sir!"

"An' we gotta do more third degreein' around here, too," went on Sheriff Cook, warming up to his subject as his mind raced back over what he had seen in his two weeks in Denver. "But we gotta do it scientifically an' delicately, usin' mental suggestion an' appealin' more to the emotions, they say, instead o' just barkin' at a suspect, or beating him up, or stickin' pins in him to keep him awake."

"Yes, sir!" agreed Shorty, nodding solemnly.

"An' now the very next opportunity we gits," went on Sheriff Cook, "the next big case——"

There was a loud rap on the door!

Shorty's face lit up instantly, as though he sensed the fact that Fate was taking a hand in the sheriff's deal. He jumped for the door with a grin of welcome spread clear across his face —perhaps here was the next big case! Flinging the door open hopefully, he jumped back and gasped at the sight that met his eyes on the threshold!

There stood Phil Eaton, his face white as chalk, and his lips quivering; behind him and to one side of him a stranger. The stranger had a gun on Phil!

"Waal, come in, come in!" cried the sheriff, breaking the spell. "Just push aside that dreamin' deputy o' mine an' come on in, gents. Seems like yuh was havin' a minor difficulty."

"Minor difficulty—huh!" exclaimed the stranger, roughly shoving the frightened Eaton into the office ahead of him. "I'll say it's minor. This bird here just shot and killed my pal—'Dad' Curtis—down the road."

Sheriff Cook got halfway up out of his chair to stare in astonishment at Eaton, who was ghastly pale.

"I did not!" exclaimed Eaton.

"Yuh did!" said the stranger, and there seemed to be a world of conviction in his crisp tones. "Yuh know dang well I came along an' caught yuh, bendin' over the body an'——"

Eaton gritted his teeth and winced.

"I'm swearin'——" He began to sputter, but Sheriff Cook, taking command of the situation at last, raised a hand.

"One at a time here, Eaton," he said, not unkindly. He had known Phil Eaton since he was a little shaver, and had never heard evil of him before. "Let this gent here make his charges, an' then yuh'll have a chance to answer 'em. Shorty—yuh take this testimony down—y'understand?"

Shorty blinked.

"Take what testimony down where?" he asked.

Sheriff Cook got up halfway again, and Shorty figured he was coming for him. Perhaps the presence of guests deterred the sheriff—for all he did was to reach for a writing pad and fling that at Shorty with a terse command.

"Write down what is said—on that paper—with a lead pencil. An' see yuh git it all, an' git it right!"

The sheriff suddenly whirled on the stranger.

"Put up yuhr gun," he said by way of starting, "I kin maintain order here—an' now, sir, to begin with, what's yuhr name, an' who are yuh, an' who is Dad Curtis?"

The stranger, holstering his gun, looked the sheriff straight in the eyes as he answered the question. The sheriff noticed that the stranger had deep-blue eyes—very, very hard.

"I'll answer yuhr last question first," said the stranger, "an' tell yuh who Dad Curtis was. He ain't *is* any more—since this feller plugged him. Dad was my pard. We was ridin' to Utah, to Price, Utah, an' comin' from Kansas. I'm Bart Wyman, an' I'm a hoss breaker an' trainer by profess'—see?"

Sheriff Cook nodded.

"An' now tell me what happened down the road?"

"We was traveling through that high mesquite," said Wyman quickly. "I stopped to tighten my saddle girths—fortunately, I guess—an' Dad went on. Two minutes later I hears a shot—just one—an' I knows something is wrong. I leads my bronc an' breaks fer the mesquite, not wantin' to show down the road. I sneaks along, an' presently I comes to this bird here bendin' over Dad—an' Dad—is dead. I drags out my six-gun an' surprises him cold!"

Shorty, writing swiftly, was making a desperate effort to get it all, but the way Eaton was choking and gasping disturbed him and made the task doubly hard.

"Waal, Eaton?"

"Sheriff, yuh know me," cried the accused youth wildly, "an' yuh know I never did a thing like that. Why, I never even had a gun on me, sheriff—an'——"

"He had the brains to throw that away as he heard me comin'," broke in Wyman. "I admit I didn't get his gun on him!"

"Go on, Eaton," said the sheriff.

"Waal—I never did it!" cried Eaton. "I heard a shot, an' I spurs up my pony an' gallops down th' road. I sees a hoss in the road an' a man on the

ground, on his face. I gits off, thinkin' he's accidentally shot. I'm reachin' over when I hears a noise behind me, an' it's this bird here a-warnin' me to elevate 'em afore he drills me full o' holes!"

Sheriff Cook frowned.

"An' the dead man—yuh left him out thar?"

"Did," said Wyman, "figgerin' the coroner would want to see or yuh might care to—so——"

"Shorty!" cried the sheriff.

"Yes, sir!"

"Go out to the scene o' this murder, pronto," said the sheriff, "an' go at it systematically. Gather up the clews at the scene. Read the signs; get a adequate description o' the way the body is layin'—distance, position. An' take the coroner along with yuh, savvy?"

"Yes, sir!"

With the departure of Shorty, who was more than glad to go, Sheriff Joe Cook adjusted his spectacles and began —what he determined was to be the keenest cross-examination of a suspect he had ever made. He had known young Eaton for a good many years, but he brushed sentiment aside, and tried to remember the skillful way he had seen the Denver chief of police question a man accused of wrong there. Sheriff Cook shook a finger at Eaton briskly, and then demanded that he tell whatever part of the story he had purposely withheld.

"Why, I told it all!"

"Yes yuh did—not!" replied the sheriff. "How come yuh're so excited an' het up, ef yuh ain't guilty?"

"Yuh'd be excited an' het up, too, ef yuh was accused of—of murder!" cried young Eaton, shivering.

That was the prologue. Craftily, then, for more than an hour, Sheriff Cook proceeded to set verbal traps for Eaton. The boy avoided them all. He stuck to his story firmly—firmly and fairly coherently at first—and wildly, but still firmly, toward the end. Again and again the sheriff led up to incriminating questions, buried in a whole string of perfectly innocent questions, as he had seen the Denver chief do. Eaton refused to make one damaging admission. Then the sheriff turned on Wyman, and what a grilling that individual got! He, too, remained stubborn. He told the one story over and over, refusing to deviate from it. Again and again the sheriff mopped his perspiring brow as he flung questions at the two men, only to be balked each time.

One man was lying—but which one?

The sheriff, relaxing at last, sprawled back in his chair and lit a cigar. He puffed away contentedly. He'd show 'em up; he'd find the liar—if Shorty didn't bring the conclusive evidence, and, of course, Shorty wouldn't. What a boob Shorty had made out of himself asking about the testimony he had been ordered to take down! As these derogatory thoughts anent his deputy raced in his mind Sheriff Cook came to a quick decision. Why wait for blundering Shorty to come in and report—nothing? No, there was no reason. He'd let the cat out of the bag at once. He'd show Phil Eaton a trick or two, and he'd give Wyman an idea of just how a real sheriff worked! He knocked the ashes from his cigar with great deliberation, while the eyes of both men were fixed upon his every move.

"Gents," said Sheriff Cook coldly, "I'm lookin' both of yuh up—but shortly we are goin' out to the scene o' the killin' an' react that murder—in a dramatic way. I reckon the guilty party will sure enough confess!"

The sheriff looked right at Eaton, who flushed.

When Deputy Shorty McKay returned, he found the sheriff alone in his office and in a black state of mind.

"Boss, I couldn't——" began Shorty.

"Knew it!"

"Knowed what, boss?"

"That yuh'd come in here without a clew, dog-gone yuhr hide, but I ain't disappointed. No, I've laid my little plans. I swan I can't budge Eaton. An' I can't tangle Wyman. One is lyin'. I means to put them through a modern, refined torture o' a third degree!"

"Yes?"

"Yes, they is a-goin' to react that murder out thar, on the scene," said the sheriff grimly. "Each will act out the part he sez he took—an' we'll see what's what. The guilty guy will break sure, ef it's dramatic enough."

Shorty shook his head wearily. "I'd like to say——" he began, but the sheriff cut him short with a snort.

"No time to hear no alibis," said Cook. "Now yuh go out an' gather up about nine or ten men. I'll want 'em fer witnesses anyhow, an' they'll serve to impress these galoots in the actin' out o' the murder. Yuh'll come along, too, an' I'll act the dead-man part, or mebbe yuh."

Shorty went out and spread the word. He soon had his ten men the sheriff required. He dispatched them to the scene of the murder, about three miles out, on the Gun Barrel Pike. Each man so sent took a few friends. When the sheriff, with Phil Eaton in tow, Shorty, and Wyman arrived on the scene, there was a regular audience waiting. Shorty cut through the crowd and made for a distant ranch house, visible beyond a number of fields. The sheriff lost no time in formalities. He glanced around and picked Floyd Penney for his man. He beckoned to Penney.

"Yuh're the dead man," he said briefly. "Flop down here. My hoss will stand by yuh—like that."

"Don't let him stand on me, sheriff!"

"Never mind that, Penney, we got more important worries than that. Hey, yuh, *Phil Eaton!*"

"Yes, sir!"

"Now yuh show us how yuh come down the road here, an' just how yuh acted when yuh saw the dead man. What yuh did—an' everything just as yuh claim happened!"

Eaton nodded. His face was ghostly white, and his chin was trembling. He stalked up the road a piece, turned, and came back, and tried to act natural. He couldn't; he seemed to be in the very throes of terror.

The crowd, which was growing all the time, watched the performance in grim silence. Sheriff Cook made no comment. He looked up and noticed Shorty talking to Wyman; neither seemed to be paying much attention to Eaton, but when Eaton had finished, the sheriff shouted again.

"Now, yuh Mister Wyman!"

"What?"

"Come out here an' show us how yuh say this all happened. Yuh play yuhr part out fer us now."

"Huh!"

Wyman, with a parting look at Shorty—a look that was all venom, stepped out into the circle and squared his shoulders. He was white, too—white as a sheet—but he got hold of himself in short order. He repeated, slowly, the story he had told for the thousandth time in the sheriff's office.

"I was back down the road—yonder," he explained, "tightenin' my saddle cinches, when I heard a shot."

Then he demonstrated how he had sneaked up the road, in the fringe of mesquite, and how he had come upon Eaton, bending over Dad's corpse.

It was intensely dramatic.

Eaton, tugging at his collar, seemed to be choking to death. The audience was pop-eyed. Sheriff Cook was smiling grimly and beckoning Wyman to go on with his acting.

"So I steps outta the mesquite," said Wyman, "an' I yanks my gat—like this—an' I taps this buzzard on the shoulder so. I says to him——"

"Yoo hoo! Wyman!" came a call from the outskirts of the crowd, and Sheriff Cook grunted. He had recognized that voice—the voice of Shorty McKay!

Wyman had looked up at the shout.

"Never mind that galoot!" cried the sheriff. "Go on—go on with yuhr play. An' then what?"

But Wyman was reeling, staggering around in a tiny circle, as though sunstruck.

"Go on!" cried the sheriff quickly. "Go on, Wyman—an' the rest o' yuh birds stay back. Go on, Wyman!"

Wyman, his eyes starting from his head, had glanced again in the direction from whence Shorty's call had come; this time he collapsed entirely.

"Go on!" cried the sheriff, stepping forward. The crowd, mesmerized, drew in closer, gazing with mingled awe and pity at the bundle of shattered nerves in the middle of the road that had been, so recently, a cool and smooth Wyman. He was all in now.

"Dog-gone it—Wyman—go on!"

Wyman turned up a pitiful face.

"I guess—I might as well—confess," he stuttered, hardly lifting his head from his chest, "that—I—shot—Dad!"

Sheriff Cook reached down and snapped the bracelets on the wrists of the wretch in the road. The audience, babbling excitedly, closed in, and the sheriff, with his prisoner securely handcuffed, turned to clap a friendly hand on Eaton's shoulder.

"That's gittin' a confession quick!" exulted the sheriff. "I guess that playin' the murder ag'in wasn't dramatic, eh? He just broke under the strain—too emotional fer him. I knowed yuh was innocent, Eaton—felt yuh was. But I knowed, too, this play actin' would do the job; he couldn't stand it!"

Eaton groaned in relief.

"Shorty whispered to me that he'd make this bird confess dern quick," said Eaton, "but I wasn't sure."

"Shorty did?" queried the sheriff, and he wheeled and glared around.

"Shorty!"

"Yes, sir?"

It was Shorty's voice, from the crowd. He came running, to find the sheriff considerably peeved.

"What was I tellin' yuh about modern methods?" asked Sheriff Cook, as Shorty listened. "I guess this emotional stuff ain't great, eh? I guess I showed that Wyman what was what. He just didn't have the heart to go through with a lie when it was all acted out so dramatic an' everything!"

"Yes," said Shorty, fidgeting.

"Yes, it sure was dramatic—that's what did it," went on Sheriff Cook, rubbing his hands together. "Wyman saw I was a keen student o' human nature an' that he couldn't fool me. He saw me readin' his very thoughts. Sure was dramatic."

"Sure was dramatic as heck," agreed Shorty, taking a long breath—and his life in his hands. "It sure was! I wanted to tell yuh something afore we came out here, boss, but yuh wouldn't let me. So I whispered it to Wyman, while yuh had Eaton doin' his actin'. Wyman wouldn't believe me, so I went an' fetched the proof, and when I yelled 'yoo hoo' at Wyman, he looked an' saw I had told the truth—an' he confessed! The truth is, boss—ol' Dad wasn't kilt at all; found him stunned by a scalp wound, that's all. He tol' me Wyman had shot him in a quarrel, an' then hid when hoof beats sounded up the road—that was Eaton. I just lugged Dad over to that ranch fer rest an' went fer him when we got back. When Wyman wouldn't believe Dad was alive an' had peached on him, I just produced Dad—so Wyman could see him. Which he did when I yelled. Waal, it *sure was dramatic as heck*—boss—*it sure was!*"

"Thar's no need o' shoutin' so," muttered the sheriff peevishly. "I ain't a bit deaf."

Your Dog

By David Post

Author of "The Old English Sheep Dog," etc.

THE COLLIE

AS a herder of sheep, the collie is unsurpassed by any other breed. Of course, I do not mean that the dogs seen on the show bench are in this class; they have been bred more and more for beauty instead of utility. In competition with the working collie, the sheep herder would be completely outclassed. Many of us have seen a collie conducting a flock of sheep through pasture land at the close of day, bringing them in to the safety of the farmyards. We have admired the dog's generalship, his ability to keep the flock together and make its members go where he wants them to go. Collies, however, can do much more than this. Sometimes two flocks of sheep, belonging to different owners, will mingle. A collie can find each one of "his" sheep in this augmented flock, drive it out from the midst of the strange flock, and make it stay out. Moreover, the collie will get every last one of his own charges, and will not take even one of the alien sheep.

The collie ranks high among dogs in intelligence. He is a very old member of the canine race, one of the oldest, in fact. Through countless generations the collie has guarded flocks of sheep from wolves and other marauders; this work has bred in him the qualities of fidelity, courage and sagacity. While the bench-show collie is not so good a shepherd as the working collie, he is a much handsomer animal, alert and loyal. In all sections of the United States he is one of the most popular breeds.

The following is the standard by which collies are judged in this country:

Head—Skull should be flat, moderately wide between the ears and gradually tapering to the eyes. There should be but a very slight prominence of the eyebrows and a very slight depression at the stop. The proper width of skull necessarily depends on the combined length of skull and muzzle; for what would be a thick or too broad a skull in one dog is not necessarily so in another of the same actual girth; it is just better supported by length of muzzle. The skull must also be considered in conjunction with the size of the dog; it should incline to lightness, accompanied by cleanness of outline of cheeks and jaws. A heavy-headed dog lacks the bright, alert and full-of-sense look so much to be desired. On the other hand, the attenuated head is most fre-

quently seen with small terrier eyes, which show no character. Muzzle should be of fair length and tapering to the nose, which should be black; it must not show weakness or appear snipy. The teeth should be of good size and even.

Eyes—There being no "brow" in which to set the eyes, they are necessarily placed obliquely, the upper portion of the muzzle being dropped or chiseled to give them the necessary forward look out. They should be of medium size, never showing too light in comparison with color or coat, nor with a yellow ring. Expression should be full of intelligence, with a bright and "What is it?" look when on the alert or listening to orders; this is, of course, largely contributed to by throwing up the ears which accompanies the *qui vive* attitude.

Ears—The ears can hardly be too small if carried properly; if too small, they are apt to be thrown quite erect or prick-eared; if too large, they either cannot be properly lifted off the head, or if lifted, they show out of proportion. When in repose the ears are folded lengthwise and thrown back into the frill; on the alert, they are thrown up and drawn close together at the top of the skull. They should be carried about three quarters erect. A prick-eared dog should be penalized. So much attention having of late been given to securing very high carriage of ears, it has resulted in reaching the other extreme in most cases, and that is now necessary to guard against.

Neck—Should be muscular and of sufficient length to give the dog a fine standing appearance and show the frill, which should be very full.

Body—Rather long; the ribs should be well rounded, the chest deep, but of fair breadth behind the shoulders, which should have good slope. The loin should be arched slightly, showing power.

Legs—Forelegs straight and muscular, a fair amount of bone; the forearms moderately fleshy; pastern showing flexibility without weakness. The hind legs should be less fleshy, very sinewy, and the hocks and stifles well bent. Feet should be oval in shape, the soles well padded and the toes arched close together.

Tail—Moderately long, it should be carried low when the dog is quiet, the end having an upward twist or "swirl." When the dog is excited, it should be carried gayly, but not over the back.

Coat—Very important. Except on the head and legs, the coat should be abundant. The outer coat should be harsh to the touch; the inner, soft and furry and very close; so close that it is difficult when parting the hair to see the skin. The mane, or the heavy hair about the neck, and the frill, the projecting apron of hair on the chest, should be very abundant. The mask or face should be smooth, the forelegs slightly feathered, the hind legs below the hocks smooth. On the tail the hair should be very profuse, and on the hips long and bushy.

Color—Immaterial, though a richly or nicely marked dog has undoubtedly a considerable amount of weight with judges. The black and tan with white frill and collar, or the still more showy sable with perfect white markings, will generally win, other things being equal.

Size—Dogs, about 24 inches at the shoulder; bitches, about 22 inches.

Weight—Dogs, about 60 pounds; bitches, about 50 pounds.

Expression—This is one of the most important points in considering the relative value of collies. Expression, like the term, character, is difficult to define. It is not a fixed point as in color, weight, or height. It is the combined product of the shape of the skull and muzzle, the set, size, shape and color of the eyes, and the position and carriage of the ears.

General Character—A lithe, active dog with no useless timber about him, his chest deep, showing strength, his sloping shoulders and well-bent hocks indicating speed, and his face, high intelligence. As a whole, he should present an elegant and pleasing outline, quite distinct from any other breed, and show great strength and activity.

Faults — Domed skull, high-peaked occipital bone, heavy pendulous ears, or the other extreme, prick ears; short tail or tail curled over the back.

The standard for the smooth collies differs from that for the rough variety only in one particular—that relating to the coat, which should look as though it were smooth. It is really harsh to the touch. Both the inner and outer coats are dense; the hair is short, but gives the dog excellent protection against rough weather.

Next week I will tell you about the German shepherd, or, as it is often called, police dog.

PANHANDLE HAS GRASS SHORTAGE

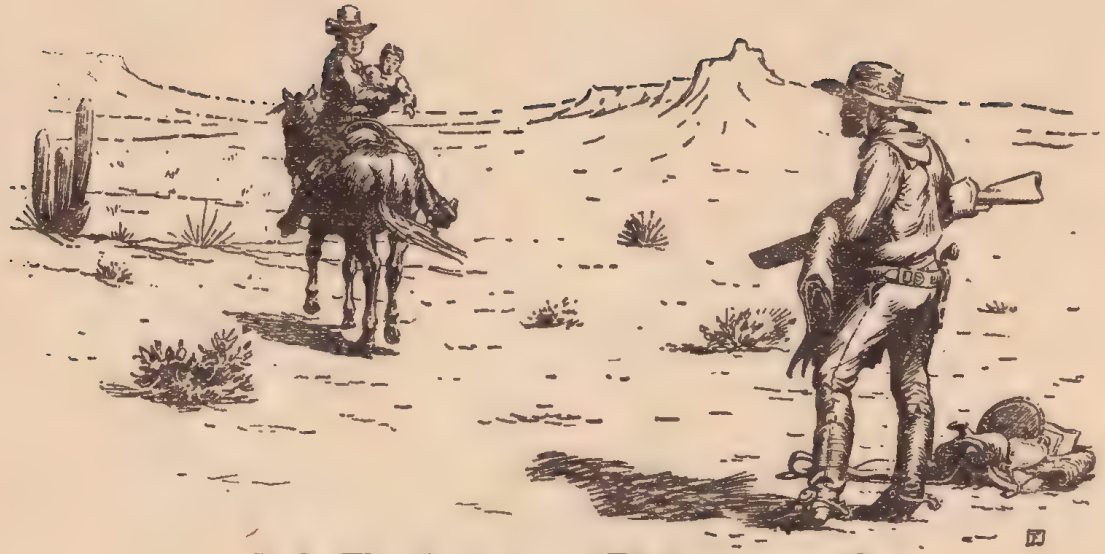
IN a good many parts of the Texas Panhandle, there has been a shortage of grass for grazing cattle this year, and for the first time since settlers came in, cattle have been moved to distant pasture lands in a number of instances. In the old days, when there was open range, and stock roamed at will, cattle drifted on the river bottoms and fared well, but under existing conditions, the land is all fenced under private ownership, and there is no place to go when the home range fails, except to ship or drive the cattle to pastures that must be leased.

EDEN COLONISTS DISBAND

ATTRACTED by the promises of gayly illustrated pamphlets, a group of thirteen families sold their homes in Checotah, Oklahoma, a little while ago and set out for a new "Eden" in Mexico, which was to be a veritable promised land for them. They had paid two dollars an acre down on the land, and were to complete payment of thirty dollars an acre in installments. The colonists, however, got no farther than San Antonio, Texas, where they disbanded, declaring that they had been led on by false representations.

GOVERNMENT HUNTERS' RECORD

LAST winter, the hunters employed by the United States Biological Survey, numbering about one hundred, killed forty stock-killing bears, forty wolves, thirty-five thousand coyotes, sixty cougars, and more than one hundred lynxes in the far Western States. The annual loss from these predatory animals at one time amounted to a million dollars annually, but has dwindled down to about one third of that figure. In Oregon one wolf is known to have killed live stock worth five thousand dollars.



White Blood

By L. P. Holmes

IF such a thing were possible, in a cow town of some eight hundred souls, then it is safe to say that all of Hualapai was holding its breath. In fact, this same breath-taking atmosphere had reigned for the better part of a week. Not that Hualapai was a town of the shrinking violet type, or one unused to momentous happenings. On the contrary, Hualapai had flourished through periods of Southwestern life that would go down as some of the most lurid and violent times in the history of our frontiers.

However, when a town is housing two of the most desperate and ruthless gunmen ever spawned from a seething furnace of hate, false pride, and white-hot passions—and when these two gunmen have entered the town with the avowed determination of meeting and shooting it out—that community may be forgiven all doubts, jumpy nerves, and spine-tingling thrills of anticipation.

In the Bella Union saloon, far on the extreme north of Hualapai's main street, men were scattered in thin groups before the bar and about the gambling tables. For the most part they were silent—speaking only when spoken to, and then in subdued tones. Though striving hard for casual indifference, the strain of waiting was easily read in their swiftly stolen glances at the yawning doorway and at the tense watchful figure in the rear of the room.

Jake Hardin was tall and thin and gangling—tow-headed, lean-featured, with the softest of spoken drawls. His clothes were rough, bleached by countless suns to a drab, nondescript gray. His hands, though tanned and muscular, were as supple and flexible as those of a gambler. Indeed, Jake Hardin was a gambler—one who lived by the terrible, swift cunning of those well-trained hands, whose life was the stake for which he played. Sagging low at either hip—and tied down—were the tools of his trade, a pair of black, ominous Colt revolvers of heavy caliber.

A man entered the doorway. Hardin stiffened, then relaxed. The newcomer, a lithe, cat-footed Mexican, padded the length of the room and halted near Hardin.

"Shuppy is leave the High Four," muttered the Mexican through twisted lips. "He is come down the middle of the street."

The gunman acknowledged the information with the slightest of nods; then strode from the shadowed gloom of the building to the blazing sunlight without. The moment he had left, the bar and gaming tables were deserted. By one common impulse the watchers rushed to the doorway. The long deferred meeting was imminent, and no one wished to miss anything of a fight that had all the earmarks of an epoch maker.

The scene was strangely unreal. There was the blanching whiteness of the sun, the deserted, dusty stretch of a narrow street—and the deadly, breath-taking portent of the two gunmen marching upon each other with slow-measured strides. Not a man among the watchers but knew what the finish of that march would be. Quick tensing of muscular bodies—flashing gleams of leaping guns, pale fingers of flame and the thud—thud—thud of dull, flat reports. Then there would be one or perhaps two dark figures immobile in the dust!

Slowly the distance between those inexorable human engines of destruction diminished. Men were holding their breath for the crash of the first shot. Then the unforeseen halted the gunmen!

From a neighboring doorway sprang a shaggy, roly-poly collie pup, and in pursuit raced a curly-headed lad of six. In the very center of the street the boy and dog went into a joyous tangle of play. At the same time, from the opposite side of the street, streaked the stocky, vicious body of a bulldog, with the single intent of fastening its powerful jaws on the throat of the pup.

A wail of childish wrath and terror rose. Valiantly the little chap pounded and tugged at the white fury that was tearing the life from his pet. And on either side of the tangle, cold eye to cold eye—stood the gunmen!

The boy looked up, his dusty face streaked with tears. "Please help me, mister," he begged, his childish treble shrill with fright. "That bulldog is killing Fuzzy!"

It was Hardin who weakened first. His grim face broke into a smile of understanding, and he dropped on one knee beside the youngster.

"Stand back uh little, son," he drawled gently. "We'll get him off. Shuppy, bring yore gun an' pry this devil's jaws apart. Got uh grip like uh bear trap."

While the bewildered spectators gazed in open-mouthed wonder, the two gunmen crouched, shoulder to shoulder, and worked at freeing the pup, their own quarrel put aside and their better natures drawn together before the common cause of a child's misfortune.

Finally Hardin rose, carrying at arm's length a writhing, frothing fury. Stalking to the edge of the street, he hurled the bulldog back through the doorway from whence it had first come.

"Hang onto that yap, Janos," he warned. "If he comes out again, I'll plug him."

Then he returned to where Shuppy and the boy were petting the pup, which had found its feet again, albeit somewhat shakily.

"Well, son," queried Hardin, "is the pup all right?"

The pup answered. His tongue lolled and he wagged his tail. The boy chortled happily. He reached up and slid shy little fists into the palms of both gunmen.

"Come on," he urged valiantly. "Pop

and mom are buying a collar for Fuzzy. I want you to see it."

With downcast eyes and breasts seething with long-dead emotions, Hardin and Shuppy measured strides with the youngster and started for the harness shop. In the doorway of the shop a wide-eyed mother, shaken with terrors now past, looked up through tears at a tall, grave-featured man on crutches, who stood at her elbow.

"Our boy may bring them together," she said softly.

It was a week later at the Sleeping D Ranch. "Old Jim" Darnley and his son, "Young Jim," were occupying a pair of lounging chairs on the wide veranda of the ranch house. At Young Jim's side leaned a pair of crutches, which he had found were a somewhat necessary aid to locomotion while his right leg—broken a month previous in an altercation with an outlaw horse—was knitting. Both father and son were silent, their eyes fixed in speculation on the white reaches of a wagon road that wound away into the seemingly limitless sagebrush wastes to the north.

"Do you think they will come?"

Molly Darnley, Young Jim's wife, ravishingly pretty in a white kitchen apron, with a dab of flour on one soft cheek, asked the question from the doorway.

"Humph," grunted Old Jim. "They promised, didn't they?"

"Yes. But——"

"They'll be here then," interrupted the old man. "Jake Hardin and Ben Shuppy may be classed as bad men and gun fighters, but you can bet their word is sacred with them. Yes, they'll be here."

"Clyde Winthrop was telling me yesterday that Hardin and Shuppy had buried the hatchet for all time," remarked Young Jim.

"Why not?" argued his father. "They really had no quarrel in the first place. The only reason they came together at all was because a lot of human rats kept urging them on for no other point except to see who was the faster of the two with a gun. For one, I'm glad they've patched things up."

"And I," murmured Molly. "'Sonny' has taken *such* a shine to them. He persists in calling them Uncle Jake and Uncle Ben. It really doesn't seem possible—men supposed to be so terrible. And they are the very personification of kindness and gentleness to my baby. By the way—where is Sonny, Jim?"

Old Jim grinned. "The young rapscallion argued 'Tex' into rounding up that old burro and boosting him aboard. Now he's gone to meet Hardin and Shuppy."

"Bless his heart." Molly's eyes were shining.

At the very moment this conversation was going on at the Sleeping D Ranch house, Hardin and Shuppy had reined in some mile and a half back along the road, and were gazing somewhat speculatively at the body of a dead burro lying beside the wagon trace.

"Now why," drawled Hardin, "why would anybody want tuh shoot uh harmless burro? Not uh half hour dead, either."

Shuppy studied the ground carefully. It was heavily trampled and cut by the hoofs of numerous unshod horses.

"Been quite a bunch of riders through here," he vouchsafed.

Shuppy was a direct antithesis of Hardin. Of slightly less than average height, his enormously broad shoulders and long arms gave him a squat, gorilla-like appearance. Curly black hair and a heavily bronzed skin lent a somewhat foreign cast to features slightly aquiline—an effect furthered by his guttural tones. Few people ever guessed that Ben Shuppy held a college degree.

Hardin casually surveyed the sign. He nodded. "Seems kinda queer. I

don't savvy it a-tall. But let's get along. We're late now. The kid'll figure we're not comin'."

A little later the two gunmen cantered up to the Sleeping D Ranch house and dismounted. They nodded to Old and Young Jim, and bowed gravely over Molly's outstretched hand. Molly's face grew slightly troubled as she looked around.

"Didn't you see little Jim the Third?" she asked anxiously. "He came to meet you."

"Not uh sign, Missis Darnley," answered Hardin, his brow furrowed with sudden thought. "Was he walkin' or hossback?"

"He was riding a burro," broke in Old Jim. "Left here nearly an hour ago."

Hardin and Shuppy exchanged a swift glance of trepidation. Molly, with her woman's intuition, caught the glance and went slowly white. Her hands fluttered to her throat.

"What is it?" she asked. "Tell me —quick!"

"The burro's lyin' back up the road uh piece," drawled Hardin gently, his eyes refusing to meet those of the frantic mother. "The animal had been shot. An' there had been quite uh bunch uh riders in there, too."

"Sloan!" cried Old Jim, rocking to his feet. "'Brick' Sloan! He threatened he would do it. The dirty coyote —and to think I let him live when I might have put him away. Jim"—the old man turned to his son—"you can't travel with that bum leg of yours, but you can get on the phone. Call Sheriff Bradley at Fort Lincoln and tell him what has happened. He knows me, and he'll move heaven with his posse, trailing down Sloan. In the meantime I'll round-up the boys and start ahead. Molly, girl, keep a stiff lip. We'll get your baby back."

Thus with characteristic force did the old cattleman direct his plan of action. Somewhere to the south, Brick Sloan, a renegade whose past history was a chronicle of misdeeds and evil inconceivable, was riding with his band of cutthroats to the waste lands of Old Mexico. With him he was carrying little curly-headed Jim the Third, as the fulfillment of long unsated revenge against Old Jim Darnley. Unless Sloan was intercepted quickly, exorbitant ransom for the child was the very least Old Jim could hope for.

Young Jim, very white and grim, limped into the house, his arm about the sob-shaken shoulders of his broken-hearted wife. His was a bitter cup—to sit helpless and crippled while the boy he idolized was carried away to an unguessable fate. The most he could do was that advised by his berserk father.

Old Jim was hurrying from the ranch house to the bunk house when Hardin rode up to him and caught his arm.

"Jest a minute, Darnley. Is this Sloan yuh speak of the same Brick Sloan that raided the bank at Grant Forks some six months ago?"

"The same," said the old man. "Why?"

"Well, I happen tuh know uh heap about that hombre—where he hangs out mostly an' where he's liable tuh be aheadin' for. 'Nother thing I know Mexico an' Mexicans, an' I can go unsuspected where yore riders can't. An' in uh case uh this sort, uh hour may mean uh lot. So I'm askin' yore permission tuh sit into this game." A look of strange shyness crept into Hardin's harsh features. "Yuh see, Darnley, the youngster calls me Uncle Jake. I—I think uh heap uh that small boy, an' I'd like powerful well tuh make uh play for him. An' Shuppy'll go with me—ain't that right, Ben?"

"Of course, I'm going," was Shuppy's quiet answer. "He calls me Uncle Ben."

Old Jim proffered an iron grip to

each of the gunmen. The old rancher was suddenly bowed with the weight of his many years. He idolized his grandson, and he was deeply touched by the loyalty of these two. He was fully cognizant of their tremendous value as allies. Their reputation and gun-fighting ability would carry them far in Mexico.

"The kid's mother will thank you better than I can, boys. You are sure a pair of white men. Yes, go by all means—and good luck. But don't take any unnecessary chances on the kid getting hurt."

"Yuh can trust us," answered Hardin soberly. "We'll bring the kid back all safe, or die tryin'."

There was that about his look of fierce sternness which robbed the phrase of any suggestion of trite blatancy. A moment later Shuppy and he were spurring swiftly away to pick up the trail at the point where the dead burro lay.

All afternoon Hardin and Shuppy rode steadily, and, for the most part, in silence. They followed the hoof marks of the raider's horses with the canny surety of trailing bloodhounds. They held their own mounts to that peculiar running walk of the desert pony that eats up miles with surprisingly little wear on either man or mount.

The afternoon paled to sunset, and sunset to mauve and violet dusk. Weird shadows leaped from the arroyos and dry washes and crept, blanketlike, from the redolent sage and greasewood. Then night came—velvet, magic night, the heavens, a limitless, vaulted dome lit with a million glittering stars—low-hung, scintillating, warm-eyed.

The hoof tracks they were trailing were now no longer visible, but the gunmen held their steady way. Finally, far ahead they picked up several twinkling lights. On viewing these the two riders reined in their horses for a breathing spell.

"That'll be Casa Grande," announced Hardin. "Which means we're over the line. Chances are Sloan and his gang went through here. Anyway, suppose we rattle along in. I know uh peon who might be persuaded to talk. Mebbe we can get uh line that a way what'll save us uh heap uh ridin'. What say?"

"Suits me," answered Shuppy. "You know this country better than I do. I'll take any chance to save a little time."

They approached the outskirts of Casa Grande quietly, and Hardin led a careful way through the narrow, odorous streets to a certain hovel, the door of which showed as a rectangle of yellow light.

"I'll go in alone," muttered Hardin as he dismounted, "I'll get better results that a way."

An ancient peon was crouched close to the murky light of a smoky fire, mumbling over the tattered remains of a newspaper when Hardin stepped softly through the door.

"Greetings, friend Pablo," announced the gunman quietly. "Yuh keep late hours these nights."

With a gasp the old Mexican whirled about, one long, skinny hand darting into the folds of a dirty serape. Recognition of his visitor was instant however, and he withdrew his hand, his lips writhing back from the yellowed stumps of his teeth, in what was meant to be a conciliatory grin.

"*Buenas noches,* Señor Hard-en. You startle one!"

"Was kinda sudden," agreed Hardin. "But I'm in uh hurry. Pablo, did Sloan ride through here this afternoon?"

The Mexican's face blanched, and he gazed about fearfully. "Ah, señor," he wailed. "Why do you ask me this? I dare not speak of Sloan—he is a devil. If he hears, he will cut the soles from my feet."

"Quiet," ordered Hardin sternly. "Sloan will not hear. Waste no more words. I must know—quickly!"

Pablo's terror of Sloan was genuine. The aged Mexican licked his lips and hugged his hands close about him to hide their trembling. His eyes pleaded dumbly—but Hardin was adamant.

"Come—come, Pablo. Yo're actin' like uh squaw. There was uh time when yuh had courage. Speak out, man—I must know. Was Sloan through here?"

The peon nodded slowly. "*Si*," he whispered hoarsely, "he came through!"

"Did he have uh child with him—uh boy with golden hair?"

"Ay," answered Pablo, gaining courage with utterance, "he had such a child."

"Where was he headed for?"

Visibly the peon hesitated; then he quailed before the icy determination in the gunman's eyes. "I heard men say to the old silver mine in the foothills of the Sierra Del Ajo Range. It is but an hour's ride from here. But he has many men—and as I say, Sloan is a devil."

"Only to those who believe he is," retorted Hardin with a grim smile. He extracted a gold piece from one vest pocket and tossed it to the Mexican. "This for yore trouble, Pablo, an', if yuh fail tuh keep quiet about me bein' here—this!"

He tapped one gun butt significantly. A moment later he was astride and lost in the night.

Left in the hovel, Pablo gazed fondly at the gold piece and shrugged. "It is in the mouths of men that Sloan will get much gold for the gringo. But death is everlasting—and when he rides with the tiger in his eyes, Señor Hard-en is death. For this day's work, Señor Sloan—beware!"

Hardin and Shuppy rode steadily until they had left the last straggling hut of Casa Grande behind; then the former drew rein and pointed ahead to where two low peaks of the encroaching Sierra Del Ajo Range formed a jagged notch against the skyline.

"There's uh silver mine back in the shadows uh that gorge," he explained briefly. "Used tuh be American property, but with Mexico changin' heads an' tails the way she is, the concession don't amount tuh much. It's been abandoned now for the past couple uh years. The peon told me we'd find Sloan somewhere about the mine. Yuh see, that's the first water after leavin' Casa Granda for sixty miles or so. I figger Sloan will camp at this water to-night an' push on early in the mornin'. So to-night's the time tuh make our play."

"Looks that way. And the chances are we can ride right into his camp. He won't be expecting pursuit so quickly."

"That's what I figger."

"What kind of a stall are you going to put up on Sloan?"

"Jest act as though we dropped in kinda accidentallike. You let me talk, an' then play up tuh my line. The first thing we gotta do, is locate the kid. Then we can get down tuh business. Well—let's go!"

A huddle of buildings, black in the shadows of the night, and a single gaunt derrick, stark in its loneliness, marked the site of the abandoned Soledad Mine. On either side the gorge narrowed, until a stone could be thrown from one cactus-clothed slope to the other. It was one in ten thousand others of a monotonous sameness which serrated the desolate flanks of the Sierra Del Ajo Mountains. The trail to the mine was faint from disuse and the effect of long weathering. Wherefore it was a boisterous, carefree band of rogues, secure in their isolation, who camped about the spring at the head of the gulch.

To one side, and gleaming faintly white, stood a battered, disreputable tent. Crouched before the open flap

was a wrinkled Mexican hag, who rocked back and forth on bare feet and crooned weird lullabies through toothless gums. On a pallet, just within the tent, curly-headed Jim Darnley the Third tossed and sighed restlessly in his sleep.

In various positions of recumbent ease, Sloan and his men lounged about. Numerous cigarettes glowed redly and the night air was heavy with the pungent tang of tobacco. Some were silent; some were conversing in low-pitched tones. Now and then a subdued laugh made light of their crime and the vengeance they knew would be sure to follow. Sufficient unto the day—it was their creed—so why worry?

Curiously enough it was Sloan, himself, who first identified the approach of Hardin and Shuppy. He caught the clump of the approaching hoofs and silenced one of his more boisterous men with a heavy hand.

"Still—you fool," he ordered. "There is some one on the trail."

Every one listened intently.

"Mebbe it's Pedro," suggested one, "comin' in from Casa Grande."

"It's not Pedro." Sloan shook his head. "Sounds like two horses."

Sloan drew a gun and glided down the trail.

"Who the devil goes there?"

The two approaching gunmen reined in abruptly at the challenge.

"Jake Hardin and Ben Shuppy," answered the former. "Is that you, Sloan?"

"An' if it is?" There was a terrible shuddering chill in Sloan's wailing tones.

"Nothin' except I'm glad we stumbled on friends. Uh Mex told us we'd locate yuh here."

"A Mex," cried Sloan. "What Mex?"

"Oh—one uh several million," said Hardin, chuckling. "But why all the fuss? We're hungry, an' our hosses need rest. Are yuh invitin' us tuh stay, or do we move on?"

Sloan considered in silence. He was openly suspicious of the inopportune arrival of the two gunmen, and his manner clearly portrayed his thoughts. He was also in a quandary. Hardin's words had put the issue clearly up to him. He did not want the gunmen in camp, yet neither did he want them to be at large with a knowledge of his whereabouts. It was a choice of the least of two ills.

"Might as well stay—now yo're here. Light down. I'll have uh peon rustle yuh some grub," Sloan replied.

A half hour later Hardin and Shuppy humped over a greasy tarp, spread on the ground, and munched hungrily. Since the time of their arrival Sloan had hung closely about with the evident expectation of hearing some unguarded word from which he might draw deductions of the real reason for their presence.

The gunmen said little, however, though their eyes and ears were working overtime. Of one accord they had marked the tent with the guardian hag and a moment later their eyes met in mutual understanding. They knew, just as surely as though no canvas wall hindered their glance, what that tent contained.

"Where you boys bound?" asked Sloan, finding a near-by seat.

Hardin nodded to the southward. "Most anywhere down there."

"Things kinda warm in the States?"

"Yep. Yuh know how it is. One day fellers of our stripe own the country. Next day we're puttin' uh chunk uh old Mexico between us an' trouble. It's uh great life."

Sloan grinned, disarmed of some of his suspicions. "Long as yuh are quick on the draw, an' ride good hosses, it's all right."

"That's us," nodded Hardin, reaching for his smoking material. "We got good hosses—an' our guns ain't orna-

ments. Whew! It shore seems good tuh rest. After this smoke I'm goin' tuh grab uh little sleep 'cause we start movin' again right after midnight."

"Why the rush?" Sloan carefully surveyed the lighted end of his cigarette, striving to make his tone casual.

"Well," drawled Hardin, with just a hint of mockery in his voice, "I've generally found that uh early start is uh good way tuh save hossflesh an' gunpowder—'specially when somebody's apt tuh be poundin' yore trail."

"That's more than half right," agreed Sloan. "Nothin' like uh early start tuh be successful in business—good or bad. If I'm not awake by the time yuh go, one uh the boys will show yuh the trail out uh the upper end uh the gulch."

Hardin and Shuppy unrolled their blankets well to one side of the main camp, and close to where their horses were picketed. In spite of their acceptance in a more or less friendly manner by Sloan, the latter's men still surveyed them in undisguised suspicion. The terse explanations given by them concerning the gunmen's presence were sound enough, but, to some of the more alert minds of the outlaw band, it seemed almost too casually perfect. However, no open acts of violence or antagonism were displayed, and the gunmen were left in peace to lay their blankets where they would.

An hour later, aside from a guard or two, the entire camp seemed wrapped in slumber. The horse herd also settled down with gusty snorts and thumping hoofs. On the north ridge clamored a mournful chorus of slinking coyotes. The few sear leaves on the stunted cottonwoods about the spring, rustled mournfully in the heated breath of the night wind. Later the east grew light and a lopsided moon came into being.

To all casual observances Hardin and Shuppy were dead to the world the moment they sought their blankets, yet some time during the intervening hours until midnight understanding was reached between them. When they rolled from their blankets, they moved with the swift, deft surety of men who had left nothing to chance or guesswork.

Their horses were swiftly saddled and accoutered for traveling. Had one been watching them closely, a single variation to their regular routine might have been noted. Hardin, instead of strapping his rope in its allotted place beside the saddle horn, dropped it carelessly over the horn itself, thus leaving it free for instant use. Then they mounted.

A Mexican stepped out of the shadows and beckoned them. He was the man Sloan had promised would show them the trail. In taking this trail, however, they would be traveling straight away from their immediate objective, which was the tent. Thus it seemed that Fate was using the first trump against them!

It was Shuppy's quick thinking that removed this first obstacle. He rolled a cigarette and, riding up beside the guide, asked the latter for a match. Then while the man was fumbling at a pocket Shuppy's right hand flashed to his hip, then rose and fell in a swift arc. The guide crumpled, senseless, beneath the barrel of the heavy gun.

Reining about, the gunmen spurred back. As he passed the tent, Hardin freed his rope and shook out a loop. The next instant it settled about the tip of the tent pole which protruded through the canvas. As the rope tightened the entire tent left the ground as though before a mighty gust of wind.

The hag, startled from her sleep, squawled vituperatively. With her cry a small, curly head thrust itself up suddenly from the blankets, and blue eyes blinked about in sleepy wonder. This was Shuppy's cue. Spurring directly into the tangle of blankets he leaned over and swept the boy up to the saddle

before him. Then he thundered away into the night, and Hardin, flipping free his rope, followed recklessly.

It was Sloan who first awakened and appreciated the calamity that had overtaken him and his gang. Their valuable and hard-fought-for prize was gone, now in the possession of two of the most deadly and desperate gunmen along the border wildness. Sloan wailed vicious, horrible curses into the night. Pulling his guns, he sent bullet after bullet roaring after the rapidly diminishing hoofs. The camp became a bedlam. Other guns began to shoot flame into the night. Men ran to and fro, stumbling, cursing, asking questions that no one seemed able to answer.

His guns empty, Sloan recovered in part from his paroxysm of blind rage, and set about organizing pursuit. Soon order replaced confusion, and shortly a compact bunch of riders swept away after the speeding gunmen.

Far out on the desert Hardin and Shuppy were having their troubles. Sloan's mad volleys into the night had worked more damage than he dreamed. Hardin had felt his mount flinch under the impact of one of those blind shots. Now the horse had drawn up, hunched and weak.

Hardin, his mouth a grim, white line, never hesitated. Swinging to the ground he placed a six-shooter to the horse's head and dropped the unfortunate brute in a huddle. Shuppy surveyed the act somberly.

"Better let me stay, Jake," he proffered, as casually as though he were offering his tobacco, instead of his life. "You know the trails out of this cussed hole better than I do. Here, you take the boy, and let me hold 'em back." He started to dismount with the words.

Hardin pushed him back into the saddle.

"Thanky, Ben," he answered gravely. "But I'm a-stayin'. You head due north now. With me holdin' them here uh while I figger yuh can win through. Good luck—an' ride like the devil!"

Hardin ran a gentle hand through the boy's tousled curls. For a moment Hardin's eyes—gray eyes which could grow bleak and harsh and terrible as eternity—misted with tears, unknown these many, many years. The boy, bewildered and knowing little of what it was all about, looked soberly at the gunman, then held out his chubby arms.

With a strange gasp Hardin caught the youngster to him, pressing the little cheek fondly against his own lean jaw.

"'By, son," he murmured huskily, "'By, little feller; Uncle Jake's glad to do this for yuh."

A moment later the boy was back in front of Shuppy, and the latter thrust an iron-hard hand down to Hardin. It was a momentous hand-slasp. In it was faith, courage—and an everlasting farewell! Then the night claimed Shuppy and his precious load.

Hardin—grim and fearless—drew his guns and laughed exultantly into the blackness.

"Sloan, bring on yo're coyotes," he said. "To-night Jake Hardin pays for some of the wicked things he's done."

A long mile to the north, Shuppy halted for a moment again. Dimly through the night came the sound of shots—and the faintest hint of shouting. The boy heard it, too.

"What is it, Uncle Ben?" he asked, his eyes round and questioning.

"It's the last stand of a very brave man, laddy," answered Shuppy. "And the vindication of a wolf—a noble, old wolf!"

And with the boy still puzzling over the words, Shuppy rode to safety across the border!

Pioneer Towns of the West

(HAYS) By Erle Wilson

Author of "Abilene," etc.

IN 1864 western Kansas was a rolling stretch of prairie on the edge of civilization. To protect this part of the frontier, the United States government built a fort upon the banks of Big Creek, which military outpost was called Fort Fletcher. But this garrison had a swift and tragic fate, for it was scarcely two years old when a heavy spring freshet washed away most of the buildings and drowned several soldiers. A new fort was then erected on a commanding site south of what is now the city of Hays. The name was changed from Fort Fletcher to Fort Hays in honor of General Alexander G. Hays, who lost his life in the Battle of the Wilderness.

This early fort had a stirring history, many thrilling events occurring during the Indian wars and the great cattle drives. The names of some of the outstanding men who helped to make the West are connected with this garrison, among them being Generals Custer, Sheridan, Hancock, Miles and "Buffalo Bill" Cody. It was to Fort Hays that General Custer brought the Indians captured by the famous 7th regiment in the battle on the Washita in 1868. Here during his hunting trip to America came the Russian nobleman, the Grand Duke Alexis, for the entertainment of whom the noted Kiowa chief, Two Lance, displayed his skill with the bow by shooting arrows entirely through the bodies of buffaloes from horseback.

When the Kansas Pacific Railroad was being built westward soldiers were sent out from Fort Hays to protect the workmen. And it was from this garrison that W. F. Cody went upon his renowned buffalo hunts, which supplied meat for the train crews, and won for him his title of "Buffalo Bill." The railroad was also responsible for the

settlement that grew up around the fort. On October 26, 1868, the railroad conveyed by deed to William E. Webb the original town site of Hays City. And on May 17, 1873, all interest in the town site was transferred to a company composed of C. H. Lebold of Abilene, Martin Allen, George N. Jones and Anna Augustine. On this date the first and original plat of the town was filed for record. The settlement was named Hays City, but the city has since been dropped by the government and the railroad.

Life in this border town in the early days was characterized by all those incidents peculiar to the frontier. Here soldiers, cowboys, freighters, gamblers and construction crews rubbed shoulders. The first three sheriffs of the town met with violent deaths. Justice was administered at the point of a six-shooter in the crude and uncompromising manner of the West. One of the most famous characters connected with this period of the history of Hays was J. B. Hickok, better known as "Wild Bill." This Westerner, noted for his unfailing ability for getting the "drop" on the other fellow, served as special marshal during the days when the dance halls and gambling dens were never closed. So deadly was Wild Bill in the use of his shooting irons that often the mere mention of his name was enough to subdue the lawless element of the community.

While Hays was the Western terminus of the railroad, business was very prosperous. This town became the outfitting station of all wagon trains following the Smoky Hill route westward. In fact, for a decade or more Hays was an important freight distributing point for inland towns lying north and south. It was also a large cattle shipping station for the vast herds driven overland from Texas and Indian Territory. And it was while waiting for delayed freight shipments or for cars to be loaded with live stock for market that many of the broils between cowboys, freighters and soldiers occurred. A quarter of a mile north of Hays was "Boot Hill," the burying ground for those who met with violent deaths and were laid away with their "boots on."

Gradually the law-abiding citizens gained the ascendancy in the Kansas town, however, and progress set in. Stores sprang up; hotels were built; a newspaper was started, and a bank came into existence. Before Hays was a year old it had a population of a thousand people. To-day this Western city has over 4,500 inhabitants. It is surrounded by a rich agricultural region that produces live stock and immense quantities of wheat, and the chief products are flour, dairy products and machinery.

Hays is a city of homes. Educationally it offers its youth many advantages, having a good public-school system, and a well-equipped public library. Upon the site of historic old Fort Hays are now the Kansas State Normal School, an experiment farm of 7,600 acres, one of the largest in the world, and a public park. This town has good stores, churches of many denominations, and thirty-five blocks of paved streets.

The commission-manager form of government is in effect in Hays, the present mayor being the Honorable C. A. Harkness. The municipality has a water plant, and electricity. The police department is most efficent, and the Volunteer Fire Department a credit to the town. The citizens of this city are neighborly, virile Westerners who believe whole-heartedly in the town's slogan: "It pays to live in Hays."

In next week's issue St. Louis, Missouri, will be described.

The Great American Game

By Albert William Stone

Author of "Why Sherman Was Right," etc.

THE whole affair had its inception in the robbery of the number three passenger train on the Del Norte & Southwestern Railroad, Taos branch. "Slip" Shotwell and his gang of outlaws turned the trick, getting something like fifteen thousand dollars in gold bars out of the express car, a part of the product of the Montezuma Mine. It is quite probable that the whole gang would have gone scot-free if it hadn't been for Gale Hannett.

Hannett was a cattle rancher in the Taos Valley, six miles below the mouth of Taos Cañon. Five of Shotwell's gang rode down the branch road where it connects with the Valley highway, and, being hungry, stopped at Hannett's place for something to eat. Two days later Sheriff McBride and a special posse treed the five in a gulch, nine miles up the cañon, capturing three of them. The other two were buried where they fell, it being the sheriff's conviction that nobody would object to the absence of regular obsequies. The captured trio subsequently found themselves in the Santa Fe Penitentiary, with sentences of a dozen years each hanging over their bullet heads.

Shotwell, himself, with the balance of his gang, had escaped to his stronghold in the Glorietta Mountains. It is presumable that he heard of the part Gale Hannett had played in the affair; for, on a morning a week and a half after the capture, the outlaw chieftain, backed by four of his desperadoes, rode up to the Hannett Ranch house in broad daylight, riddled the rancher with bullets as he stepped from his door, and left his body lying on the hard adobe before his own doorstep.

To be sure that there would be no mistake as to the perpetrators of the crime, Shotwell scrawled the following warning and pinned it on the dead man's shirt:

> This gent didn't keep his trap shut. Anybody that dasts to bury him gets the same dose. Fair warning.

A neighboring rancher discovered the body, read the warning, and notified Sheriff McBride by telephone. The

sheriff came, looked, and declared that it was a job for the coroner. That official, duly notified, sent back word that he was just starting for a long trip into El Paso, and rendered an unofficial decision to the effect that Hannett had come to his death at the hands of Slip Shotwell and associates. The body might be buried any time, the coroner added.

The upshot of it was that poor Hannett lay in the ranch yard for nearly a week. Everybody thereabouts respected the reputation of Shotwell too profoundly to risk being shot from ambush. Then little Ramon Trujillo, the scrawny old Mexican who lived on his ten ancestral acres, five miles down the valley, heard about it.

Ramon was sixty-five years old and had been born on the ranch, which had been in the possession of the Trujillo family since shortly after the invasion by Coronado. He had a three-room adobe house, flat of roof, and nestling under a huge cottonwood tree as old as Ramon himself. The ground around the house was packed as hard as the bare feet of generations of Trujillos could make it; the old wooden latch always hung outside the door.

Nothing tickled old Ramon more than to have strangers or neighbors ride up to his ranch, which was on a side road three miles from the main Valley highway to Santa Fe, and ask for something to eat. Famous as a culinary artist was Ramon. He could prepare the delectable *chile con carne* as few others could do; across the entire front of his house hung a line thickly fringed with chile peppers, so red that they fairly assaulted the eye with crimson glory. Give old Ramon the materials and an hour's time, and he could set before his guests a meal that would have made the lords of ancient English castles smack their lips in anticipation.

The old Mexican had some queer ideas about neighborly duties. Hearing about the dead body lying in the Hannett ranch yard, he climbed astride one of his tough little burros and investigated. The warning was still pinned to the dead man's shirt front; but Ramon could scarcely speak English, let alone read it. He assumed that the paper contained his American neighbor's name, perhaps.

In an hour he had laboriously excavated a grave in the oat field that adjoined the house, dragged the body to the edge, lowered it in, and said a prayer in mumbling Spanish for the soul of the departed, crossing himself devoutly before he shoveled the loose dirt back into the hole. He fashioned a rude wooden cross out of a couple of sticks, scratched something in Spanish on the cross piece, and left. He had surely done his duty; his patron saint could not fail to reward him.

Slip Shotwell, knowing little about patron saints and caring less, swore horribly when he heard that the body had been buried. When informed that old Ramon Trujillo was the culprit, he swore more savagely still.

"Things have come to a pretty pass when a Mexican can defy an American citizen like this here!" he exclaimed. Shotwell had peculiar ideas about class superiority and citizenship. "We'll fix him mighty soon and complete, with all the frills. He's got to be made an example of."

Perhaps Ramon's advanced age made some impression on Shotwell's toughened heart fibers, however. It's one thing to murder a man in the full flower of his manhood, but quite another thing to employ similar tactics upon a grandfather, even though he may be only a Mexican. So Shotwell sent word to the old man to leave the country within twenty-four hous, or take the consequences.

The message being written in the difficult English tongue, Ramon took it to Sandy McIntosh, his neighbor on the

south. Sandy read it carefully, and spoke his mind fully.

"This here Shotwell is a verra bad mon," he said in his broad Scotch accent. "I'm thinkin' ye'll be showin' the better part o' wisdom by obeyin' his orders, Ramon. He's the sort o' mon that kills first an' is glad of it afterwards. I'll gi'e ye three hundred, cash on the nail, for you r-ranch an' all that's on it."

But Ramon Trujillo did not care to part with his ancestral acres and homestead for the sum offered by Sandy. His apple orchard sometimes brought in half that much in a single season. Besides, surely the Señor Shotwell was but joking with him. Kill him because he had performed a decent act of kindness for a dead man? *Impossible! Eso es impossible!*

The old Mexican went back to his adobe house, cogitating deeply. Suppose he should get out of the country—where should he go? His limited knowledge of the American language precluded the possibility of his removing to any other part of the United States, did it not? Surely he could not exist in that part of Mexico across the Rio Grande, where the people were subjects of the republic and therefore not good Americans, like Ramon.

There was his grandson, also, to be considered. Juan was getting an American education in the school at Santa Fe, where he had already learned to sing "My Countree, Ees of Thee," and "Coloombie, thee Gem of thee Ocean," as lustily as the best of his associates. What would become of the bright-eyed Juan? There were only Ramon and Juan left of all the Trujillo family, be it remembered. The rest had been carried off by the dreaded "flu" epidemic, some years before.

The Señor Shotwell was surely joking. Ramon would pay no further attention to the message. His simple mind refused to dwell longer on the matter, once he had decided to forget it. He would do as he had always done during his long residence in the valley of the beautiful Taos—attend strictly to his own business, and let the good God attend to the rest. *Eso se comprende!*

Just a week later, to the day, Slip Shotwell and his entire band of outlaws pulled rein, one bright morning, at the spot where the Valley road to Santa Fe intersects with the fenceless lane that led to Ramon's squat adobe dwelling, basking peacefully in the early October sunshine.

"Down there is where that greaser lives," Shotwell announced to his companions. Where they were going is not material, since now it will never be known. "The one that buried Hannett ag'in my orders. Reckon we better take time to ride down there an' fix him."

"That's right," said the others in a gruff chorus, mixed plentifully with profanity.

They were a hard-looking crew, their natural villainy enhanced by a long night ride without food. Their unshaven faces made them look even harder than they were. They pulled up noisily in the open space before the door in the adobe house and shouted, with lurid oaths, for the owner to come forth. It happened that the old man was in his treasured apple orchard, painstakingly picking fruit. The orchard extended on its far side down to the gleaming river, where huge cottonwoods fringed the banks and nodded to the coming of the fall breeze that blew from the north. Tall grass grew in the orchard; on the other side was a goodly field of alfalfa, the golden stacks in the center testifying to the abundance of the crops that year. Fourteen-year-old Juan, shock-headed and black-eyed, was helping his grandfather.

"Vengo," called old Ramon, limping toward the fence with what alacrity he

could command. "I am coming, señors." He came inquiringly through the gate, puttering about to refasten the latch with his usual meticulous care. "Eet ees that you would partake of refreshment—yes?"

He spoke partly in English, partly in Spanish, after the method of Valley residents. It is probable that Slip Shotwell had taken no thought whatever of food up to that instant. Then it flashed across his brain that here, before him, was a man famed over seven counties for the excellence of his cooking. The gang had ridden hard and far the night before.

"Sure, hombre," he cried with a growl, dismounting and dropping his horse's reins over its head. "Grub for us all, savvy? Plenty of it. And don't take all morning throwing it together, either."

He mouthed directions to his gang, and the dismounting became general. Guffaws of laughter came from the men. A good joke; they would enjoy the old Mexican's hospitality to the full, and then give him a one-way ticket to the other world by way of payment. A new kind of compensation for hospitality, to be sure. Shotwell was noted for being an original thinker where deviltry was concerned. And the gang was undeniably hungry.

Old Ramon was frankly puzzled. With the warning received from the bandit leader reasonably fresh in his mind it was inconceivable that he might not consider the possibility that these were Shotwell's men. Yet Ramon had never seen Slip Shotwell to know him.

"It is not possible," he muttered to himself in Spanish as he vanished into the house and made for his kitchen stove, where he began hastily gathering together materials for one of his savory meals. "These hombres are hungry; they are not killers. It cannot be so. If they wished to kill me, could they not have done so when first I came from the orchard? Killers do not eat first. They kill at once."

He ordered the shock-headed Juan to the spring, twenty yards from the house, for water. Juan came back five minutes later and reported, his eyes popping, that horsemen had been stationed so as to guard the place from all quarters. It looked bad. Still the old man would not give up.

"Go into the other room and get the gun that hangs on the wall, over the fireplace," he commanded, a quaver in his voice.

One of the desperadoes, lounging by the door, stayed Juan. "Leave that there gun alone, kid!" he said threateningly, laying his hairy hand on the protruding butt of his own six-shooter. "An' don't try to touch it ag'in; see?"

There could be little doubt of the character of the visitors, after that. Still the old man temporized with his sense of reason, while his fear grew. His only other weapon was the inevitable knife, which he carried thrust through a sash at his belt. Of what avail would that puny implement of defense be against a dozen revolvers, to say nothing of the rifles which every man in the gang carried? Just now, to be sure, the larger guns were stacked against the adobe walls of the house, while their owners lounged about and waited impatiently for the succulent provender being prepared by their unwilling host.

At the end of three-quarters of an hour, during which Shotwell and his men uttered more than one expression of profane impatience, the old Mexican announced that the meal was ready. With the aid of the boy he carried the steaming, fragrant dishes to the long table in the main room and, under the hard eye of the bandit leader, arranged the rude chairs about the board. The four men on guard outside were told to remain where they were until relieved. The rest, eight as ugly and un-

regenerate-looking human devils as could have been gathered together in a year's search, took their places with a jingling of spurs and accoutrements. Every man drew his six-shooter from its holster as a preliminary precaution and put it at the side of his plate. They were literally walking arsenals, and gave ostentatious notice of the fact.

Ramon's trepidation was heightened when, upon starting to return to the kitchen, Shotwell stopped him with a curse.

"Stay where you are, greaser!" he ordered harshly. "I'm keepin' you where I kin have my eye on you; see? Soon's I've finished eatin', I got business with you."

"Si, señor." The little man grinned placatingly, his silvery mustache trembling under his long nose. "I but wished to get you the mescal, señor."

"Mescal?" he echoed. His teeth bared in a sudden gratified smile. "Say, now, this is better than I expected. Eh, boys?" They greeted him with a chorus of anticipatory growls. "Sure thing, hombre. Bring on your mescal. Bring it *all* in. An' pour me out a big drink, 'cause I'm powerful thirsty."

Ramon returned after a moment with a jug, which, from his difficulty in lifting it, appeared to be full. He poured out a stiff libation, passing the tin cup to the big bandit, who quaffed the draught noisily. The others followed suit. The jug was large, but twelve New Mexico desperadoes have considerable combined liquid capacity, even for such fiery stuff as Mexican mescal. It is the sort of drink that will make a fearless, fighting devil out of a coward, and Shotwell's men were hardly cowards to begin with. They would only become more reckless and ruthless than ever, once their brains were inflamed with the dangerous liquor.

"If your behavior was as good as your mescal, greaser," Shotwell remarked after his third cup, "you'd git along better. Here"—to the boy, Juan, who had made as if to leave the room—"you stick right where you are!"

He laid one hand menacingly on the revolver at the side of his thick crockery plate, and scowled. The boy tremblingly took his place at the side of his grandfather, who stood against the wall. The men continued to eat and drink, their gurgles as they imbibed the mescal mingling with the smacking of their unshaven jaws over the food.

The sun was high when the men finally were filled to capacity. They were far from helplessly drunk. Shotwell, himself, retained a cool head; the ferocity in his hard gray eyes was intensified, that was all. He pushed back his chair and rose to his feet, swaying slightly but fully master of himself.

"You cook a good meal, greaser," he said, baring his teeth under his tawny mustache. He had bushy brows of the same color and a shock of coarse hair that cascaded down from under his big hat over his forehead. "The world is goin' to lose a good cook when you're gone, which is sure some pity. Good cooks ain't so numerous in this here country."

"Si, señor," said Ramon, shrinking noticeably against the wall. The eyes of the boy were fairly starting out of their sockets; for the menace in the leader's voice was unmistakable. His eyes, likewise, were like those of a wolf.

"A good cook," continued Shotwell, picking up his revolver with his right hand, and weighing the weapon reflectively. "It's too bad you ain't as good at keepin' your mouth shut as you are at makin' grub fit for a white man to eat."

"Si, señor."

"Not that you talked, either," the bandit recalled. "What you done was to bury Gale Hannett. When you had fair warnin' to leave him alone."

"Si, señor." The voice of the little Mexican was suddenly eager. "But—

I did not know—I cannot read the English."

"You knew, all right," interrupted Shotwell, his voice rising. "You knew blamed well that you oughta left Hannett alone. Nobody else offered to bury him, did they? That oughta been enough for you, greaser. But you had to butt in where you had no business, didn't you?"

This time the little Mexican made no answer. Had the bandit looked closely he would have noted that Ramon's little black eyes were glittering strangely. The other members of the gang had pushed back their chairs and possessed themselves of their guns, awaiting action by their chief. A piece of cold-blooded business was about to be transacted, and they wanted to be in on it. Several of them had risen to their feet.

"So I guess I'll have to throw a slug into you," Shotwell concluded, raising his gun slowly. "You buried Hannett, and now you kin go an' keep him company. If you know any prayers, hombre, better say 'em quick. We gotta be goin' right pronto."

"Wait!" Ramon Trujillo cried.

He had straightened suddenly, one hand upraised. It was trembling noticeably as the knuckles knocked against the adobe of the wall.

The desperadoes glared at him. It was their purpose to fill the shriveled body of the old Mexican with lead the instant their leader gave the signal. It was the usual procedure, and it was unlikely that they intended to alter it in this instance. At his shrill command they stood rigid. Shotwell's thick lips were parted. Ramon had thus far made no show whatever of resistance, and it seemed probable that he intended merely to give voice to futile pleas for mercy.

"Well, what is it?" asked Shotwell, with his gun halfway up. "Make it snappy. We can't wait around here all day."

"Eet ees—eet ees that I——"

"Talk Mex, if you kin git it out any better!"

Ramon's speech slid into Spanish; like so many of his kind, he spoke the purest Castilian. His agitation seemed to disappear with his abandonment of the more difficult tongue. His hand ceased to tremble, and he talked with a curious deliberation.

"The señor threatens to make an end of me," he said, his eyes glittering brilliantly in their deep-set sockets. "For performing a humane act——"

"Never mind the argument!" interrupted Shotwell impatiently. "You buried Hannett, and that's all there is to it."

"It will be well for the señor to be patient a moment," Ramon retorted surprisingly. "And for his men also. Let it not be thought that Ramon Trujillo did not recognize you when you rode into his yard, Señor Shotwell, for he did. And he knew you immediately for what you are—cutthroats, robbers, thieves, murderers——"

"Take care, you fool!" shouted Shotwell, instantly in a rage. An answering growl rose from the throats of his men, and more than one revolver came to position. The chief glowered at the little man, whose timidity of a few minutes before seemed astonishingly gone. It was his very temerity, in fact, that stayed their trigger fingers for the moment.

"It will be better for you, señor, to be calm," he said clearly. "As for me, what have I to fear? I am old. At the best there are but a few years of life left to me. But I wish to live those few years, not for my own sake, but for the boy, here." He nodded toward the cowering youth. "If you kill me, what is to become of him?"

"What the devil do I care what becomes of him?" shouted Shotwell. "If that's all you've got to say—"

"And so," Ramon continued, as though he had not been interrupted at

all, "I ask you; can I help you to escape from the horrible death that even now assails you, after I, myself, am stiff?"

He paused dramatically. Stunned silence, broken only by the impatient stamping of the horses in the yard, greeted his astounding outburst. Then one of the men near the door uttered a startled oath.

"What's he talkin' about?"

"Just this, señor the robber," said Ramon, bowing to the inquirer. "You have been pleased to drink great quantities of my mescal. Now you think you are pleasantly drunk, whereas it is the truth that you have imbibed the deadly poison of the Taos Pueblo tribe. Even now, my friends, you are face to face with the 'Great Beyond!'"

"Poison!" yelled Shotwell, his voice rising above the clamor that suddenly began.

The little Mexican bowed, his glittering eyes making his face look like a death's head. "You made the mistake, señor, of leaving me in the kitchen without a guard," he said coolly. "I could not escape; but I could drop in the jug the fatal potion, brewed in the ceremonial caves and kivas of the Indians. And now, señor, shoot if you will. I hold the price of my life here." He tapped his forehead with a significant gesture. "The poison is slow and sure—and horrible in its final effects," he added quietly. "I, only, have the antidote."

It was the word that the chief had been trying to remember. "So, you hound, you've poisoned us, have you?" The big robber brought his gun up with a jerk, aiming it at a point directly between the little Mexican's eyes. "Now, trot out your antidote mighty quick, before I drill you!"

Ramon Trujillo only smiled. He seemed strangely at ease now. "Kill me, and you all die," he said softly. "Spare me, and I can save your lives. Only *I* can do it, señor. Shoot if you wish."

For several seconds the bandit glared at him along the barrel of the revolver. The little man did not flinch but continued to smile. Presently Shotwell lowered his gun.

"Like as not you're lyin'," he said uncertainly. A sense of abdominal distress was growing upon him. "But I'll give you a chance to show you ain't. Give us that antidote right away an' I'll let you go free—this time."

"It will take some time to brew the antidote," Ramon replied, still softly. "In the meantime, all the guns must be brought to me, here." He pointed. "You are not to be trusted, señor. I am waiting."

The temerity of the demand staggered the gang. Ramon folded his arms after the manner of an Indian chief who has just finished a speech in council. Shotwell swore, and his oaths were echoed, with variations, around the room. They could overcome the little Mexican with ease, of course; but what of the antidote that only he could give them? If they were to try to torture it out of him, precious time would be lost. He had said that the poison was slow, but how slow?

Hesitation was brief. Then there was a rush to deposit the weapons before the Mexican on the table. He called for the rifles, and insisted that the four sentinels be brought in also and disarmed. It was done. At his command, the entire dozen desperadoes lined themselves up against the opposite wall, as motley a group as were ever assembled together under a single roof. Some of them were already groaning in terror. With the guns and shells all in a pile before him, Ramon suddenly snatched one and trained it on the line. His eyes glittered more brilliantly than ever.

"Listen, thieves and murderers!" he exclaimed. "I have lied to you. Gour-

mands, the pain you feel is caused only by the food you have eaten. Swine! Cowards! Scum! I but lied to you, to frighten you. *There was no poison in the mescal!*"

Shotwell was the first one to gather the import of the little Mexican's revelation. No poison in the mescal? He drew a long breath of relief, and gathered his muscles for a spring. Instantly the gun was directed to him.

"The first one to make a false move, señor, dies," Ramon said evenly. "Rush me all together, and at least two of you will be sacrificed before you can reach me. Does the commanding señor wish to be one of the two?"

The commanding señor did not, evidently. He subsided with a baffled growl. The other men remained in the line, swearing fluently in two languages. Ramon turned to the boy, Juan, who had straightened up, his eyes staring now with astonishment.

"Go to the telephone, yonder," his grandfather ordered, nodding toward an instrument attached to the wall at the side. "Communicate with the sheriff. Tell him to hasten to Ramon Trujillo's house with fast horses and plenty of men; for I am an old man, and do not wish to have to hold these jackals in leash too long."

The boy moved down the side of the table toward the telephone, his wide eyes trying to look in two directions at once. The air was electric with danger. The bandits growled like animals awaiting feeding time, but the muzzle of the revolver in Ramon's hands held them. They subsided. The boy took the ear trumpet from the hook after grinding the signal. In the pause that followed, loud breathing filled the room.

"I—— I weesh to speak weeth the sheriff," the boy said, quavering into the transmitter presently. "Queeck, please!"

Shotwell spoke to the bandit nearest to him, out of the side of his mouth. "Why in thunder didn't we have sense enough to cut them telephone wires?"

"That's what I'd like to know," responded the other sourly.

The message delivered, with the astonished sheriff promising to be on the spot as quickly as he could muster the necessary posse, a dramatic wait followed. Outside the sun mounted higher and higher, until it was at the zenith of the blue sky. The herd of goats in the corral back of the ranch house gathered before the gate and bleated for their noon meal. The bandits' horses snorted and stamped impatiently. Inside the little adobe house, squatting peacefully in the sunshine, twelve ugly and desperate outlaws glared helplessly at two diminutive individuals, who had refused utterly to become agitated at the profane taunts hurled at them.

The long-looked-for sound of horse's hoofs came at last. Sheriff McBride, red-faced and huge, was in the lead. With weapons drawn the posse alighted and approached the house cautiously. They entered front and back with a concerted rush — and found that the only thing necessary to do was to fit handcuffs to the wrists of the snarling prisoners.

Little Ramon Trujillo, suddenly exhausted, sank into a chair and grinned wearily up at the sheriff, who stared down at him in amazement.

"Tell it, Ramon," he commanded tersely. "You've pulled a miracle today. I find you keeping guard over twelve of the worst criminals in the Southwest, with all their guns corraled. You an' your kid grandson. How did you do it?"

The little Mexican lifted his shoulders in a characteristic shrug. "I capture them with—what you call—thee Americano bluff," he explained, his black eyes twinkling. "I tell them that the mooch pain they have from eating come from thee mescal, which I tell

them ees poisoned. Savvy? Then they give me their guns, to bribe me to mix thee—what you call——"

"An antidote?"

"Si, señor."

The sheriff swore in admiration.

"There's about twenty thousand dollars in rewards coming to you for this piece of work," he said, as he left. "You'll be rich, Ramon. And take a tip from me; you don't need to send that grandson of yours to school to learn to be a good American. If he'll just take after his grandfather he'll learn it fast enough. See?"

The old man was still flushing swarthily with pride at the compliment as the horses clattered their way up the unfenced lane toward the road that leads to Santa Fe.

ELK AND DEER BEG AT DOORS IN BANFF

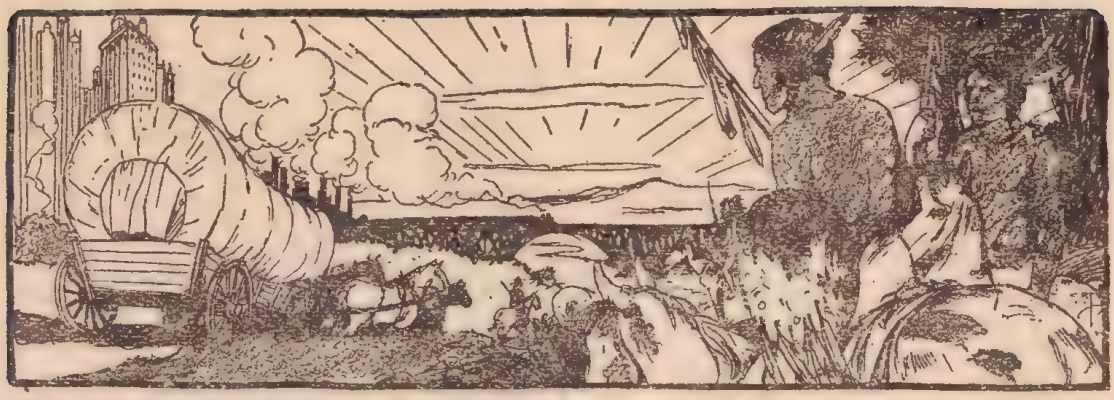
DURING the heavy snows of the winter, elk and deer were no uncommon sight on the streets of Banff, Alberta. The animals made a practice of nosing around kitchen doors, begging for titbits, which were gladly given to them by the householders. One big elk with a superb set of antlers was conspicuous for the regularity of his calls, as well as for his imposing appearance.

STOCK RANCH CHANGES HANDS

THE Roy Owens stock ranch of two thousand acres, situated three miles southeast of Cottonwood, California, was sold a little while ago to R. B. Wilson, a Los Angeles capitalist. F. Davenport, of New York, is also interested in the deal, he and Mr. Wilson being extensive ranch owners in southern California and Texas. In future the ranch will specialize in dairy cattle, hogs and the fattening of beef cattle and sheep.

AIRPLANE SERVICE FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

IT is reported that an airplane service from the Pacific Coast to the Dease Lake district is planned by an organization in Vancouver, British Columbia. The service is said to be subsidized by large operators in the district, as well as by the Provincial Government. It is hoped that the planes will eventually operate between Vancouver and Dease Lake and also link up other outlying parts of northern British Columbia.



NOTABLE EVENTS of the WEST IN 1925

February 1.—Residents of Mokelumne Hill, California, discover the body of Edward Curry, aged miner, dead for a week, with his nearly starved dog watching over him.

February 2.—The dog sled arrives at Nome with diphtheria serum and new heroes are hailed in Gunnar Kassen and Leonard Sapella.

February 3-4.—Emil St. Goddard wins the two-hundred-mile dog race held in Manitoba every year.

February 4-6.—Heavy rains fall in California, as much as three and one half inches in places.

February 6.—Ed Steel of United States Biological Survey kills five mountain lions in one day, in Black Mountains of New Mexico.

February 9.—This was Tacoma's coldest day recorded—six above zero. Even the salt water froze.

February 10.—Northwestern citizens contribute shipment of hay for Alaskan deer, reported starving.

February 12.—George and Henry Norman of Scott's Bar, Siskiyou County, California, report taking $16,000 from gold placers in last ten days.

February 13.—J. J. Carter, one of the last "Pony Express" drivers dies in Salt Lake City.

February 14.—Three thousand eight hundred and ninety-five cowboys send valentines to two hundred and sixty-six Western schoolma'ams.

February 15.—M. H. DeYoung, prominent figure on the Pacific coast for sixty years, dies—he was founder and owner of the San Francisco *Chronicle* and established the splendid museum in Golden Gate Park.

February 16.—George C. Carson, of San Francisco, wins millions of dollars in claims against the copper smelters for infringements of patents.

February 18.—The Florence Lake power tunnel in Sierra Nevadas, thirteen and one half miles long and costing millions, is completed.

February 22.—Camp Curry, famous Yosemite resort, consolidates with a rival company.

February 22.—Daniel Guggenheim, noted mining man and former Colorado senator, gives three million dollars to scholarship fund.

February 23.—Alaska feels a severe earthquake.

February 23.—Jud Kent wins the American dog derby at Ashton, Idaho. A Pocatello team was second.

February 28.—California oil output for the week is half million barrels.

OTHER EVENTS

California is picking her navel-orange crop worth millions. Dozens of the ten thousand cars required for lemons are also being filled each day.

Randsburg, in the Mojave Desert, California, becomes the leading silver district of the world.

Gilbert, the new gold camp near Tonopah, is arousing widespread interest as new finds are made.

A movement is afoot to bridge the Golden Gate.

The Rocky Mountain States experienced the dryest winter in years. Snow on the mountains was scant.

Black Vengeance

By RICHARD ROWE

Author of "Grubstaked," etc.

SUDDENLY Rob Roy snorted; he scented danger. It was not danger to himself that he feared as much as danger to the band of wild horses that looked to him for leadership. Hardly a day passed but that some unusual sound started a stampede. Usually the cause was foolish and due most to high spirits. Of late, such stampedes had been infrequent. The sun's blast had rolled the carpet of green higher and higher until it reached the very mountain peaks. A brown, parched land was all that the eye could see even from the highest butte of the Guthrie Buttes group.

To the coal-black stallion this danger he scented seemed real and menacing. Immediately below him, the band nibbled the dry stubble and found scant food. A half mile to the right an almost-dry spring seeped from the rocks and partly filled the water hole. Such was the thirst of the band these hot days that the spring failed to yield more than a ration. Of nights Rob Roy heard the rustle of other creatures about the hole; sometimes the screams of fighting animals reached the band.

The scent came stronger, and with head held high, nostrils dilated, he whirled with uplifted hoofs, then stopped. Except for the occasional movements of the band, all was still.

In the western sky the flames of the setting sun leaped high—but in the valleys and draws far below, purple shadows lent a softness to the land, as if nature sought to make amends for the merciless heat of the day.

For a full minute the stallion stood tense; gradually his muscles relaxed, and he lowered his head. A few blades of grass, sheltered from the sun, grew at his feet. He nibbled a moment, then looked below with a guardian eye. Most of the band were bunched, but the youngest colt, as black as Rob Roy himself, and with the earmarks of a thoroughbred, had strayed away. His youthful nostrils had scented water, and he knew the water hole was just over the ridge.

Intent as mothers sometimes are in other matters, Regina, the black mare,

failed to notice the straying of her offspring. She nibbled steadily, because she was under the double burden of feeding herself and nursing the colt.

Rob Roy glanced about for possible danger. None apparently existed; yet it did exist in the slinking form that had almost circled the band in making for the water hole.

The greater part of the day the creature had looked down from a ledge and alternately slept and panted. It was large even for a mountain lion, and of late it had found the greatest difficulty in satisfying its enormous appetite. The deer on which it preyed had left the country, partly because of its presence, but chiefly because of the lack of food. Starvation had driven them close to the Guthrie Ranch house, and nights they leaped the fences to feed from the stacks of hay.

The cat, like most of its kind, was fond of horse meat. Several times during its marauding, it had come upon old horses, alone and dying. Each had proven an easy victim. Of late he had stalked the band at night, hopeful that a stampede would leave some of the colts behind. In this he had failed, for with the colts remained the mothers. Terrorized and frantic with fear they might be, yet each mare remained close to her offspring, and frequently the black stallion's hoofs thundered to the rescue. Always the cat withdrew. This he did leisurely; with a bound he was beyond reach of the stallion, and he knew it. From a convenient ledge he snarled defiance, then withdrew to wait. Experience had taught the cat that by waiting, eventually prey would come his way.

Now it seemed as if his patience would be rewarded. He saw the colt make his awkward way toward the water hole and crouched low. The alarm that had disturbed the stallion several minutes before had apparently been forgotten; the band continued feeding.

It seemed an eternity to the waiting cat before the colt gained the top of the small ridge; each moment he expected the mare to follow. Again and again the colt paused to sniff at a blade of grass or pretend alarm over imaginary danger. On the crest of the ridge he lingered, the evening breeze stirring his rather small tail and mane, then he descended.

Trembling with eagerness, the cat tensed for the leap, hoping to bring down the colt without a cry—that he might gorge himself and be off before the stallion or mare could interfere. As the colt lowered its head to drink, the lion launched himself silently from the ledge. His aim had been taken with the utmost care; he sought to break the back from the force of his impact. In this way he brought down huge bucks at times without danger to himself.

The danger instinct already manifesting itself within the colt perhaps whispered a warning. Possibly realizing that for the first time he was away from his mother, and alone, worried the colt. Almost as the cat leaped, the colt's head jerked upward, and his slim legs carried his body a few inches to the left. One huge paw with the cruel claws curling outward was all that struck the little colt. The blow was glancing, but of sufficient force to knock him to the earth.

It had all happened so quickly that the colt's surprise was complete. One moment he was lowering his head to drink; the next there was a nameless warning—then the blow. The snarling cat bounded several yards away, whirled, and returned to the attack, as the colt struggled to its feet. Only one cry had come from the son of Rob Roy—and that a strange, instinctive fear cry, seldom heard from horses. When it is given, it sends a chill through the veins of the most hardened man.

The colt's cry was the same as that of the grown horses, except for a plaintive, youthful note, as a child facing danger for the first time might cry out. It

seemed to reach deep into the draws as well as the walls of the butte. The echo had not died away before the answer came in the thundering hoofs of Regina, the mother. The colt galloped blindly from the scene, straight toward a box cañon just beyond the water hole. The cat turned back and estimated the danger from the approaching hoofs. It realized there was great danger. Danger to self was balanced against hunger, and hunger won. If he moved swiftly, he might bring down the colt and escape to some convenient ledge before the mare arrived.

Several seconds later the colt realized escape from its relentless foe was cut off by sheer walls. It whirled about with wild eyes and trembling limbs, and faced the crouching creature in whose tawny being mercy was unknown. Again that cry rang out, and to the beating of the mare's hoofs was added the louder menace of the stallion's. Rob Roy's final plunge carried him to the crest of the ridge. He stood outlined in all his black vengeance against the sky a brief instant, before he galloped down the slope. Regina was at his heels. There was something in the attitude of both animals suggesting great, personal fear of the cat; yet there was something else deep within, stronger, that impelled them onward.

On the colt's soft velvet coat of black there was the crimson line left by the cat's claw—a very fine line as if drawn with a single, downward stroke by a pen dipped in red ink. It was not the wound, for that was on the surface, but fear, that caused the colt to stagger. Twice he almost fell as he galloped toward his mother, then as Regina stopped and turned around, he came along beside her.

Mare and colt did not pause, but galloped away from the thing behind them, the colt running with his ribs against his mother's, finding protection and comfort in the contact. High on the ridge, the mare paused and looked back. Then it was that the colt's strength suddenly deserted him, and his slim legs gave way. The mare looked down and understood the reason for the trembling limbs and pounding heart. Even her own heart was pounding from fear and effort.

Far below, Rob Roy was fighting a battle that had started on the earth when the first two living things of different species met, and which would continue down through the ages. There was nothing new in the struggle; it was merely new to the big, black stallion and the snarling cat. In each was bred mehods of offense and defense, plus skill of a sort.

The cat, with the usual smug assurance of its breed, looked for a convenient ledge or rock above the horse's head to which he could leap and find security. His eyes roved the sheer walls briefly; then he gathered for a mighty spring. His forepaws caught a knob of rock eight feet above the ground, his hind claws scratched lines on the rock surface in a desperate effort to lift his weight to the only spot on the face of the cliff within reach. For several seconds he held, then, realizing there was not room enough, dropped lightly to earth.

Already the stallion was rushing toward him. Again and again Rob Roy had encountered the hateful creature in the vicinity of the water hole. He was a constant menace to the colts and old horses of the band. A coward at heart, the cat had always avoided the stallion, but now each creature sensed a reckoning had come at last.

Rob Roy reared upward and then, striking out furiously with his forefeet, drove the cat closer to the narrow wall. Snarling, the cat withdrew into the last recess, and the stallion with either wall within inches of his sides followed. Again the hoofs struck out, and the cat's snarl of rage and fear matched the

squeal of the horse. In an instant the stallion had become a black fury, intent only on driving the lithe body into the earth beneath his hoofs.

As the stallion reared upward for the next plunge, the cat's great muscles tensed and snapped. With a bound he had cleared the ground and was launching his body straight at his enemy. The claws curled, slipped an inch or two as they struck the stallion's shoulders, then caught. The snarling mouth sought the throat; the hind legs lifted, shot out, and found lodgment; the tawny back curled. In desperation the stallion lunged against the rock, seeking to crush the cat from sheer weight. The cat's hold almost weakened from the pressure, the rough face of the rock rasped his smooth back and tore fur and skin. It was to be a battle to the death and the cat had tasted blood.

Again the stallion lunged against the rock with crushing impact. His legs swayed from the weight of his body, and the toll that the battle was exacting in strength. In a few minutes it would be all over, unless he shook the cat off. He was frantic now; fear and fury both ruled his actions; fear of this thing, fury because he was losing the fight and realized it.

In one final effort he reared on his hind legs until it seemed as if he might fall backward. For a fraction of a second he tottered with the curled, snarling thing at his throat; then he came down against the rock once more. The cat screamed, the scream of a creature that has suddenly received a mortal blow. The hind legs slipped, then the left fore-paw and finally the right. The crimson-stained body of the cat twitched a moment, became silent, then with amazing vitality grew active once more. Into the cruel eyes came life, cunning and hate. Slowly it began to crawl away. Perhaps in time it might recover and once more strike terror into the hearts of weaker creatures. Rob Roy's hoofs lifted from the ground and came down —sharp, unshod hoofs that cut deep. The cat's eyes glazed slowly, the muscles that had grown tense again, once more relaxed.

Again and again the hoofs came down with the weight of the infuriated stallion behind them. Bit by bit, the cat's body was driven into the dirt until little remained, and that little was slowly being covered by sand drifting from above.

The stallion stopped at last and staggered wearily toward the water hole; then he loweerd his head and drank. When he again lifted it, he felt new life asserting itself. He was hurt, but he was also a victor, and a victor forgets his wounds. He lifted his head once more and looked about. Yes, the nightmare of the last half hour was over. The calmness of peace had once more settled down on the land. The draws were filled with shadows, softened in places where the light of the half moon had reached. The peaks were bathed in a silvery light, and from distant pines came a cool breath that drove the heat from his wounds, the fever from his blood. Somewhat stiffly he made his way to the top of the ridge and looked beyond.

Regina and her colt were just joining the band. The others were cropping the short, dry grass. Slowly the black stallion descended and joined them. An enemy had been vanquished, a cruel, sneaking enemy, that had preyed on the weak. Now there was peace, and it would remain. The band moved slowly down a draw, Rob Roy at his place—in the lead.

In New Mexico

By James Edward Hungerford

WITHIN my yearnin', longin' breast,
I nursed a vision fair,
That some day I would travel West,
An' make my home out there.
An' after while, my dream came true,
An' Westward I did go,
An' landed 'neath the skies o' blue
Out in New Mexico!

I saw Las Vegas, Albuquerque,
An' also Santa Fe,
An' then I looked around fer work—
Fer here I meant to stay!
One day, down by the ol' depot,
In sunny ol' Rincon,
I met a gent I used to know,
Back in the days long gone.

He owned a ranch, ten miles from town,
An' cattle, sheep, an' sich;
His skin was burned a 'dobie brown,
An' he was rollin' rich!
When last I'd seen 'im, he was pore,
An' scarcely had a buck,
But now he had the coin galore—
Had shorely played in luck!

I went to work on his outfit,
An' learned the punchin' game,
An' all the "ins" an' "outs" o' it,
Until I'd mastered same.
I saved my money, dime by dime,
By strong ambition spurred,
An' after while there came a time
When I, too, owned a herd!

I now am reckoned well-to-do—
A big-boss cattleman,
An' I am strong an' healthy, too,
An' sport a coat o' tan!
When evenin' comes, I take my ease
In my own patio,
Fanned by the sweet, sage-scented breeze
Of ol' New Mexico!

The Round-Up

UP stands Vernon W. Lowell, him as hails from Ticonderoga, New York, and speaks right out, the very first thing, sayin':

"EVENIN', BOSS AND FOLKS: Nothin' like startin' off with a little poetry; it kinda 'iles things up. O' course, there be poetry and poetry, and this here poem ain't so good as that there Hungerford gent writes, but I'll tell yuh just how it is. Now I been figurin' for a long time how to edge my way in around that there fire. You say yourself you kinda cotton to poems—so here it is:

"High on the slopes of the Sandstorm Range,
O'ershadowed by peaks, fantastic and strange,
In a draw that was deep and hidden well,
Where the glancing sunbeams seldom fell,
And the purple shadows shift and change,

"There fed a band of the wild-horse breed,
Those shy, free animals born with speed,
That's equaled by nothing in all the land;
For who can follow the mustang band
Under the wise old stallion's lead?

"The herd was restless with nerves drawn tight,
They'd had no water for a day and night,
O'er hot mountain rocks and dusty sage
The battle of wits they'd been forced to wage
Had kept them in swift and continuous flight.

"Not the mountain lion, the wolf or bear,
Could force the horses from that wild lair,
Nor thirst—but a scent that's sharp and clear
On the wind they sniff with mounting fear;
It's that hated man taint in the air.

"A snort of alarm, a piercing call;
They're bunched up under the cañon's wall.
A thunder of hoofs, a flying form,
And down the draw like a wind-swept storm,
The echoes, rolling, rise and fall.

"Then into their faces straight ahead,
The yelling of men, guns flashing red;
The scraping of hoofs, a sliding stop,
A wheeling turn, on the trail's steep drop,
They're racing up the dry stream bed.

"Too late! For down from the upper end,
The roaring flames their red glow send,
They're fearful shafts that pierce the gloom,
To spell these creatures out their doom,
And the violet shadows tear and rend.

"There's no way out of that trap—but wait!
The stallion wheels, eyes filled with hate,
And plunges straight at the cañon's wall,
Whose pitch would a mountain goat appall,
And tosses the gauntlet down to fate.

"He goes bounding up with mighty strides,
Into the shadows where grim death hides.
A dizzy climb, but he's reached the crest,
With arching neck and heaving chest,
And his neigh the call of fate derides.

"He tosses his head, he's free once more,
While from the cañon a prolonged roar
Arises, as the men stand in a daze,
Rooted to the spot in sheer amaze,
Paying their tribute to wild-horse lore."

We'll jest remark that that there poem, as Vernon has jest give us, is A No. 1, prime.

"Runnin' Iron Bill," or Will Bard, 1400 East Twenty first Street, Salt Lake City, Utah, has a little to say about breakin' horses. All interested, lend an ear. We note that there is not an ear which is not loaned for this spiel. Let 'er go, Bill:

"HELLO, BOSS AND FOLKS: I just jogged in from Utah, so I will turn my horse in the cavvy and bed down here for to-night. I have been an interested reader of the arguments over breaking and training horses, and would like to chip in. I have broke and trained horses for some of the largest outfits in the West, and I fully agree with Jessie Landfair in regard to the training of colts. I have never used the method advocated by Miss Spanish Bit. Wonder if she knows that a severe bit not only ruins a colt's mouth, but is also apt to cause him to turn a 'back flop,' which is more dangerous than the worst pitching. If Miss Spanish Bit is so fond of sharp things, she should try riding a porcupine through a cactus bed, with a rose bush for a quirt. I have bought several fine, blooded horses which had been mauled around by would-be trainers or bronc twisters, and have found that the most of the so-called 'bad ones' are made so by cruelty. I have one horse, Diablo Blanco, which they said could not be gentled or trained. I have owned him about two years, and he is a 'top-rope horse,' and can be ridden bareback by a ten-year-old girl. He was not gentled by the methods used by Miss Spanish Bit. Be kind but firm, and have a good understanding of a horse's nature, and disposition, and there is very little trouble with any of them. Well, I must roll in, so good-by."

Here is another gent as wants a wild animal. He's William Lumm, 498 Catherine Street, Fort Lee, New Jersey. Box one of his favorites up and send it along. Do you want her with a muzzle on, Will?

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Having been a constant reader of your interesting magazine, and seeing the help you offer your readers, I am taking this opportunity to ask for your assistance in getting me a coyote.

"I am willing to pay for same, provided the price is within my means. I know that this is something out of the ordinary, but I have taken quite a fancy to have one, and the only place I could look to for advice was the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. What I would like to get is a female about one to three years old, the color to be as near a silver gray as possible."

Regardin' a famous holdup, Earl J. Prichert, Lyons, Colorado, sure seems to know what he's talking about:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: In regard to information wanted on the holdup of the San Bernardino to Yuma, Arizona, stage, this holdup was true, and sixty thousand dollars in gold nuggets in quart cans, and three thousand in bills wrapped in silk was taken. There were twenty-nine men in the holdup. The two leaders were brothers. They were followed through to Golden, Colorado, where soldiers from Fort Logan picked up their trail and found them camped in Upper Elk Creek, some ten miles south of Georgetown, Colorado. There the oldest brother was killed, and the rest of the men captured, but the gold was not there, only one quart, which was being divided at the time of capture. The rest of the gold was buried and place marked, but the chart showed a change of names in the creeks, so no one knows if it ever was discovered, but it has been thought that the captain of the troupe found it later.

"I have been over the ground where it is supposed to be, but never took enough stock in it to look for it. I have often thought of writing a short story on the subject. Perhaps some of the WESTERN STORY readers would care to read it.

"I think the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is the best book of its kind I have ever read. I sure did enjoy Ronicky Doone and his adventure. Why can't we hear from him again? Perhaps he has settled down now, since the girl came in the limelight."

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

The Man He Couldn't Get

A NOVEL

By GEORGE OWEN BAXTER

Throughout the years, they had played grim tag—the powerful ranger seeking the great outlaw. There was no "hunk," no respite, until the girl became an unconscious factor in the game.

SAM AND THE THIRSTY COWBOYS

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

Trying to get a rise out of "Dynamite Sam" and, at the same time, annex an important possession of his, caused complete catastrophe on the ranch.

WHEN HE DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE

By EDWARD T GLYNN

The man had a lust for gold and killing. The cold and the wilderness taught him that the West penalizes as lavishly as it gives.

AND OTHER STORIES Order Your Copy Now

Be kind to yourself—order a Hollow Tree badge.

Send twenty-five cents in stamps or coin to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, and state whether you want a button for your coat lapel, or a pin.

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

EVER been alone and friendless and then suddenly found a friend? Wasn't it like having the sun come out warm and shining upon a world that had been dark and clouded? And what a lot of difference a letter can make! To feel the friendly bulk of it in your pocket during the day makes your work easier and your heart lighter; the answering of it in the evening is more than a pleasant occupation. To find a real friend is like discovering a new world. If you have not yet found one perhaps you will among the writers of this week's Hollow Tree letters. Read them and see.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE has been a real pal to me. From coast to coast, under a counter in a Pittsburgh "Five-and-Ten," under the hot sun at Cañon Diablo, on a Hollywood movie lot, on the beach at Miami, before a blazing fire of logs in Petoskey, Michigan, with the snow so deep outside that every one in the town is a prisoner in his own house—in all these places you may have found me and WESTERN STORY.

I'm twenty-two and fond of all outdoor sports. I've seen and done lots of interesting things, and I'd be glad to write to any sisters of the Gang. I've a pair of tweeds, an old sailor middy, and a pair of "Keds" that are getting rusty from lying in a bureau drawer, and I don't fancy staying in New York City all the winter, although I love the snow as well as the desert. I'd like to hear from Marie of California, as I also am looking for a girl to go to the coast with me.

A GIRL ROVER.

Care of The Tree.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a girl twenty-one years of age, whose daily occupation is that of secretary to the president of a large corporation; I also work evenings as a reporter on a daily newspaper.

I like most things the average American girl likes: tennis, golf, dancing, swimming, and movies. I have traveled over practically the whole of the United States and Canada, and will be especially glad to tell about the eastern half of our country. I have interviewed a number of movie and legitimate stage stars, and shall be glad to tell about them to those interested. My ambition is to become a writer.

Will girls from all over the world write? I should like to hear from Irish girls between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two.

FRANCISE.

Care of The Tree.

DEAR READERS: I want to tell you about my trip from El Paso to New York. We

went by train to New Orleans, a two-day trip, and then took the boat for New York. Our train was ferried across the Mississippi.

New Orleans is a quaint city with its old French, Spanish, and Creole quarters. It has the widest thoroughfare in America, Canal Street.

The boat trip to New York was delightful. The water was smooth and calm, and we enjoyed the ocean breezes for five days.

As soon as we landed we began seeing the sights of New York. We went to the observation gallery of the Woolworth Building, which is the highest in the world, fifty-eight stories above the ground. We also saw Trinity Church, City Hall, Fraunces Tavern, where Washington bade farewell to his officers in 1783, Wall Street, and the Stock Exchange, which resembles a mad house. We passed through Greenwich Village, New York's Latin quarter.

Crossing the East River over the Manhattan Bridge, we motored through Brooklyn, and on our return went through New York's East Side with its immense population of foreigners. A visit to the largest and richest art museum in America, the Metropolitan, was included in our sight seeing.

We also took an all-day motor trip up the Hudson through the Sleepy Hollow country, covering some one hundred and fifteen miles.

Let me hear from sisters who like to travel.

PAULINE ANDERSON.

609 North Oregon Street, El Paso, Texas.

DEAR GANGSTERS: Meadville is an old town and the location of Allegheny College. It is situated in the valley made by French and Cussawago Creeks, which united their columns here on their never-ending march to the sea. Washington passed through here twice, once carrying messages from the governor of Virginia to the commander of the French fort twenty miles from here, and once with an army on his way to join the Continental forces. Lafayette passed through here, also Perry, on his way to Lake Erie to build ships to do battle with the British in 1812.

I will be glad to send additional information about my town or to write sisters who want friendly letters from a girl of nineteen.

RUTH M. COLLOM.

491 Walnut Street, Meadville, Pa.

HELLO, HOLLOW TREE: I have read your cheery letters for a year now and wonder at myself for not joining in sooner. I am a cowgirl of Alberta. Two years ago I started a university course, but was forced to discontinue on account of a nervous breakdown. I have been a nervous wreck for two years, but during that time I lived in the saddle. You cowfolks will understand when I say that I am now well again. Today I registered at the school for another year. Won't some of you please write me, as I do not know any one here and am lonely. I'd like to hear from one who has visited Africa; I expect to go there some day. I am twenty-one.

HILDRED CUMBERLAND.

Camrose, Alta., Canada.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: It would make me so happy to get some nice letters. I live on a four-hundred-and-eighty-acre farm in the beautiful Ozarks; it is situated between two hills; on the south side are apple and peach orchards. There are several large springs on our place; one is not a dozen steps from our back door.

I am a slight cripple, have been ever since I was sixteen years old, but I am not at all helpless; can do almost anything any one else can do. What I like best to do is read. I'll be watching each mail for letters.

ELLEN STRAIGHT.

Route 5, Gentry, Ark.

DEAR GANG: I am a native of Utah who came to California for a trip, and will trail back in the spring. I can't get used to this sandy country. Have worked on ranches in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. I have handled horses for the past twenty years, and have always found the better you treat them the more you can get out of them.

I would like information about raising sheep on a farm. How much land would it take for summer pasture for about three hundred head? And how much hay does it take to feed a sheep four months in winter? Will appreciate anything the Gang has to tell me about sheep raising. I expect to locate in southern Utah. I like the mountains; no desert for me.

F. D.

Care of The Tree.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I thought that many of your readers would be interested to know of the one club in the U. S. A. that runs parallel with the interests of your magazine, the Adventurers' Club. We will always be glad to welcome any wayfarers coming this way or hear from adventurers at any time. We have callers from all over the world, and the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE interests all and is read from cover to cover.

In the spirit of the West and adventure.

EDWARD P. BAILEY, Pres.

1307 East Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, Calif.

Vern L. Briggs, R. 2, Grants Pass, Oregon, is a fire warden of the Siskiyou National Forest and will give information about this work as well as about mining, logging, hunting, and trapping.

Will those brothers who teach history and economics in high school, or are preparing to do so, write a college student, in care of The Tree? He'd also like correspondents who're interested in commercial designing.

If you live in Central America and speak Spanish and English, Eugene R. Gregory, 673 North Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois, wants to hear from you.

"I work on a large farm, never have a chance to go anywhere, and get awfully lonesome," writes O. Warren Overington, care of W. C. Kahler, Clarksville, Maryland.

Lonesome Lon is looking for a correspondent who can tell him all about ranch life; in return he'll send pictures of interesting places in and around his city, San Antonio.

Miss M. Robinson, 45 Fairfield Street, Wandsworth, S. W. 18, London, England, will exchange letters, pictures or post cards with Hollow Tree sisters who want to hear from a Britisher.

"I am in the United States Coast Guard, serving on one of the cutters forming the Bering Sea Patrol; I greatly enjoy letter writing and will answer promptly all letters received Please address them to Baldy Pop, in care of The Tree."

Brothers from all over the world are invited to write George E. Nickerson, 21 East 22d Street, Baltimore, Maryland. He'd like to exchange snapshots, post cards and Western poems, also sea chanteys.

Here's another brother who wants to exchange snapshots, especially of animals, trees and flowers: Wm. Skopec, 743 North Oakley Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois.

HISTORIC CALIFORNIA PALM MOVED

REPORTS from Los Angeles, California, describe the moving of one of the four oldest palm trees in that State for a distance of two miles and its replanting in a garden. The palm tree stands over eighty feet high and weighs more than sixty thousand pounds. The work of removal and replanting cost fifteen hundred dollars. The huge palm was brought to California from Sinaloa, Mexico, by the padres in the days of Spanish dominion.

BANDITS LOOT POST OFFICE IN THE BEARPAWS

REPORTS from Havre, Montana, state that the post office at the little town of Cleveland, in the Bearpaw Mountains, was robbed by bandits recently, several parcel-post packages and a sum of money being the loot. Clothing in the store in which the post office is situated was also stolen. The bandits got in through the rear of the store, and Sheriff Fleming of Chinook, a town twenty-five miles distant, went to the scene of the robbery as soon as word of it reached him.

Where To Go and How To Get There

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

OUR NATIONAL PARKS IN WINTER—HOT SPRINGS

POSSIBLY the peculiar charm of the Hot Springs National Park is due, to a certain extent, to the many legends that have been woven around its marvelous springs. They were supposed to transform old men into youths, and to roll back the years from the whitened heads and bent shoulders of any and all who might drink of the miraculous waters that flowed in warm streams from the base of the wooded Ozarks, standing like giant sentinels over the valley, protecting it from the cold winds of winter, and sending down their cool breezes to fan it when summer breathes her warmth over the land.

Whatever the reason may be, certain it is that this region has an attraction for people in all quarters of the globe. Whether it is the mystery of the gushing hot waters, or the beauty of the mountains, or the sunny skies, or the treasured memories of the past—for these springs were old long before Rome was built—or the legends of those North American Indians who traveled hundreds of miles to come to this valley, where they sat in council and acquired wisdom and health through the waters of the fountain of youth, or all these combined, who can tell? One thing is certain, and that is that this region holds the same fascination today for us as it did for the Indian of ancient times and all the early explorers.

The Hot Springs National Park, near the center of the State of Arkansas, has the distinction of being the first of

our National Parks, and dates back to the year 1832, when the four sections of land surrounding the hot springs were set aside by act of Congress for the future disposal of the United States, not to be appropriated for any other purpose whatever, thus making the first national park reservation of the country, and preserving the waters of the springs in perpetuity, free from monopoly and commercial exploitation.

The park contains over 900 acres and includes Hot Springs Mountain, North and West Mountains, Sugarloaf Mountain and Whittington Lake. The springs are all grouped about the base of Hot Springs Mountain, their daily flow being about 851,308 gallons, which is supplied to the various bath houses. The receipts from this source are deposited in the United States treasury.

The climate is good throughout the entire year, and while in the earlier days this was exclusively a summer resort, of late it has become a favorite winter recreation ground. A large number of visitors come here to escape the cold of the North and to enjoy the two magnificent golf courses, the horse races, the ostrich and alligator farms, mountain climbing, riding, motoring, and other sports with which the days are taken up, for it must not be supposed that only sick persons frequent the springs. Quite the contrary; many of the visitors come, especially during the winter months, for recreation, for outdoor exercise and to enjoy to their heart's content the ever beautiful mountain scenery.

It is supposed that the Spanish explorer, De Soto, visited the hot springs in 1541, and the legend tells us that various tribes of Indians fought for control of the waters, in which they believed the Great Spirit was ever present, until finally a truce was made, and the sick of all tribes were allowed the freedom of the springs. The first white settler probably made his home here about 1800, because in 1804, two of Lewis and Clark's men, leaving the main trail of that expedition, came upon this place and found a log cabin and a few huts which had been the work of white men's hands. Later some scattered settlers followed the trail thus blazed, their stories bringing others, so that the reputation of the marvelous springs spread, until the fame of their healing qualities was borne all over the country, and the government took steps to preserve the hot wells of the Ozarks to the people for all time.

The city of Hot Springs has extended beyond the narrow valley in which the springs are situated. It spreads out over the open plain to the south and east, the mountains of the park rising about 800 feet above the city. Much money has been spent by the government in hewing roadways, trails and walks that wind around the mountains. From these heights, one may get a fine view of the busy city, and stretching far beyond are beautiful farms, dotted here and there, fruit-laden orchards and bright gardens. It is indeed a wonderful sight.

For wild beauty there is nothing finer than that which is found on the drive through the Gorge between North and South Mountains. This huge cleft, with its jagged cliff sides, gives one a profound impression of the tremendous past when great cataclysms first tore these hills asunder.

Within the Gorge, the government owns and operates a modern tourist camp for automobile visitors, with all camping facilities, an abundant supply of pure water, and a large swimming pool with dressing rooms for men and women. This camp is two miles from the center of the city of Hot Springs, which is easily reached by automobile over good roads from practically all points in the United States. It is on the direct line of the Bankhead Highway, reaching from Washington, Dis-

trict of Columbia, to San Diego, California.

The Hot Springs National Park is under the control of the Director of the National Park Service, whose representative is Doctor Joseph Bolton, Superintendent, Hot Springs, Arkansas. All inquiries relative to the park, requests for descriptive literature, et cetera, should be addressed to him.

ADDRESS WANTED

I am holding several letters from readers of the department intended for Mr. Jimmie Bowers, whose address was given in care of the Comanche Mining Company, Benton, California. I published a letter in the department from Mr. Bowers over the initials J. B. some time ago, but mail forwarded to the above address is returned.

THE LAST WILDERNESS UNDER REGULATION

ALASKA, the land that sportsmen have always regarded as their last wilderness where they will be altogether free from the restraint of game laws and such regulation, has finally been subjected to the mandates of a fish and game commission. Even Alaska has begun to feel the depletion of its wild life at the hands of indiscriminate sportsmen, and the necessity of conserving these resources of the territory has been realized in time.

ARIZONA'S OLDEST RESIDENT DIES

WHEN Pablo Moreno passed away recently at Phœnix, Arizona, at the age of one hundred and ten years, the State of Arizona lost its oldest inhabitant, according to general belief. Pablo Moreno was born on April 12, 1815, in Mazatlan, Mexico. He is survived by fifty-two grandchildren, fifty-five great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren, all of whom were born in Phœnix.

MORE LIBERTY BONDS FOR INDIANS

THE purchase of three million dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds as an investment for individual restricted Indians of the Osage tribe of Oklahoma, was authorized recently by the secretary of the interior. The money accumulated to the credit of these Osage Indians through the payment of their shares of annual royalties from oil on the Osage reservation. The bonds will be held by the Treasurer of the United States for safekeeping under guardianship of the government, the Indians receiving the income from them.

MISSING

This department is conducted in both WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

JOHNSON.—Son of Andrew Johnson, 1541 Maine Street, Oconto, Wisconsin. Last heard of from Seattle, Washington, in 1912. Had an anchor scar on left side of his face. Was tall, slim, and had light-brown hair and blue eyes. Please write to father.

RASMUSSEN or **ANDERSON, Mrs. MANGHILD.**—Disappeared from her home in Otsego County, New York, July, 1917. Please write to Mr. H. Hansen, 494 Yetman Avenue, Tottenville, Staten Island, New York.

KOSTRY, KOST or **KOSTROBINICH, GEORGE.**—Formerly lived in Whiting, Indiana, and Cleveland, Ohio. Write to your sister, Mrs. Anna Abbott, Box 141, Alvin, Texas.

CHURCHILL, Mrs. VERDIE.—Last heard from in Dover, Kansas. Please send any information to Wilbur Saxton, 4382 Yates Street, Denver, Colorado.

WALKER, JESS ALEXANDER.—Over fifty-five years of age, six feet tall, light complexion. Last heard of in Spokane, Washington, in 1907. His father, who is eighty-four years old, would like to see him again. Address Mrs. Flora Taylor, Box 133, Lapwai, Idaho.

FOSTER, LOUIS WALLACE.—Left his family twenty-five years ago. Was a railroad man, and was last heard of in Los Angeles, California. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Alice Marie Flood, 909 West Ninth Street, Pueblo, Colorado.

CLEMENT, JACK.—Oil-well driller by trade. Last heard of at Martin, Texas. Information desired by former tool dresser. Write R. W., care of this magazine.

LOFTON, EDWARD M.—Was in Seattle, Washington, two years ago. Write to your brother, G. L. Lofton, Bella Vista, California.

BILL.—Letter at "Western Story" for you. Babe.

BALEY, BERNARD.—I am so worried. Please write or come home. Mother.

THOMAS, WILLIE.—Of Seattle, Washington. Left home July, 1923. Nineteen years old, medium height, dark auburn hair, and freckles. Father is sick and mother dying. Old address, or this magazine. W. P. T.

NEWSOM, JOHN.—Formerly of Menon, Idaho. Forty-nine years of age, tall, dark eyes and hair. Write to your mother, Mrs. Mary Newsom, Tulia, Texas.

SINGLETON, EDGAR.—Formerly of St. Louis, Missouri. Please write to your cousin, Rayfield Gordon, Welsh, Louisiana.

GIVENS, ABE, ED, or **BEN.**—Please write. Dad very low. Letter to Pawhuska returned. Your half sister, Pauline Givens, Box 1123, Phoenix, Arizona.

BURROWS, MRS. ROY.—Please write. Dad very low. Your half sister, Pauline Givens, Box 1123, Phoenix, Arizona.

THOMPSON, LYLE.—M. M. T. and Patti are in Ocean Beach, California. Please write to them care of this magazine. M. M. T.

HONEY, ALVIN.—Left Valley, Nebraska, in 1914. About fifty years of age, large, broad shouldered, blue eyes, and dark hair. Has injured foot. Please write to his niece, Lela Barnes Shoen, Wilkie, Saskatchewan, Canada, Box 25.

MIKE.—I am at 1619 South Second Street, Louisville, Kentucky, and waiting from your promised address Samoht Birab.

BARNS, WILLIAM.—Believed to be in Nebraska. Has two brothers, Frank and Edward. Please write to Frank W. Emrick, Buchanan, Iowa.

LEWIS, DOROTHY.—Lived in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1918 and knew me as a soldier at Fort Benjamin Harrison. H. B. Ivy, Headquarters Company, Fifteenth Tanks, Fort Benning, Georgia.

MOORE, CLAUDE.—Last heard of was in the navy. Thirty-six years old, blue eyes, and red hair. Address his sister, Mrs. S. B. Main, 535 Pine Street, Abilene, Texas.

CATHRIGHT, DENNIS and **EARL DIBBLE.**—Please write to Carroll F. Fellows, 2417 West Fairview Avenue, Spokane, Washington.

McALISTER, RAYMOND C.—Believed to be in the West. Please return or write to your heartbroken wife, Mrs. Gladys McAlister, Quinlan, Texas.

T. E. D.—You were misinformed. I had no such intention. You have no need to fear, as there seems to be no proof. Write to Fannie.

AL.—You are always welcome at mother's house and mine. Please write. Vi.

PURCELL, HARRY.—Thirty years of age, tall, light-brown hair, blue eyes. Please write to your wife at 50½ South Main, Union City, Pennsylvania.

PENNINGTON, GEORGE and **DELLA** and **AUDRY CAMPBELL.**—Last heard of in Portland, Oregon, in 1922. Please write to your cousin, William E. Pennington, 930 Escobar Street, Martinez, California.

JUNIOR.—Will stay here until I hear from you. Am saving mother and dad this worry. I love you. Baby.

PATTEIGER, ALBERT.—Last heard of in Chicago, Illinois. Please write or come home to your wife and children. All is forgiven. Mrs. A. Patteiger.

GOBLE, CARL.—Please write to your mother, Mrs. E. E. Goble, 2864 McPherson Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

NELSON, ROBERT, LILLIE, STANLEY, BEATRICE, and **HOWARD.**—Children of Seymour and Mary Nelson. Were sent to the Children's Aid Society, New York City, in 1915. Robert is twenty years of age. Please write to your aunt, Mrs. C. P. Monfils, 2265 Crane Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

SWATHWOOD, WALTER.—Please write to me. Jack Mills, 330 Eleventh Street, Toledo, Ohio.

ALANGO, PETE.—Please write to your daughter, Lucille, at 435 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, California.

BURCH, FRED L.—Cook in Aero Squadron G, at Ellington Field, Texas, in 1919.

ANSTEY, EDWARD L.—Was aboard the U. S. S. "Mohawk" in 1919 at Aberdeen, Scotland.

PARQUETT, N.—Cook in Headquarters, Fourth Field Artillery at Corpus Christi, Texas. These three people please write to an old friend, Mrs. Clara C. Cleere, Route 1, Box 236, Houston, Texas.

McAULIFF, K.—Was in Bonham or Paris, Texas, in 1883. Please write to your daughter, Ara Lee, 3713 Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

BANKS, C. H.—Auto trimmer. Was in Chicago in 1905. Believed to be in the West. Mrs. Kathryn Ellsworth, 3713 Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

PATTERSON, ISAAC T.—Last heard of in Kansas City, Missouri. Mrs. Grace Hunter Ditzer, 726 Coulard Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

PEOPLES, JIMMIE.—Short, black hair and black eyes. Please write to your mother, who is worried. Mrs. J. G. Peoples, Route 3, Elba, Alabama.

DOLPH.—All well. Would love to see you. Nathan W. Bennett, Auburn, New York, R. D. 6.

HAINSWORTH, SARAH ANN and **JOHN.**—Came to Canada from England twenty-one years ago. Were in the Salvation Army. Please write to your cousin, Mrs. M. Silk, 217 Sewell Avenue, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

CHAMBERS, ARTHUR.—Brother of Mrs. Cora Carroll. Please write B. E. Stephenson, Box 1018, Paducah, Texas.

SHUEMAKER, MRS. LAURA.—Last seen in Redding, California. Very small, black bobbed hair, tortoise-shell glasses, sickly, age thirty-three. Write to B. H. Shuemaker, P. O. Box 332, Redding, California.

FLOSSIE.—I can't forget you. Freddie, Havana, Illinois.

SLOANE, VIVIAN.—Last heard from in Des Moines, Iowa. Please write to your old pal, Harlam McClintock, Box 514, Spirit Lake, Iowa.

MEMBERS of Headquarters Company, Eighth Infantry, also J. G. Lael, Frank S. Finley, Richard N. Henry, Sarah Vance, and "Daddy" Gross, write to A. Levesque, Box 204, Balboa, Canal Zone.

STIER, or STIERER, HARRY.—Last heard from two years ago in Buffalo. Address J. M. Jona, 99 Wyllys Street, Hartford, Connecticut.

WHITNEY, ELEANOR, ETHELYN DE ARLINGTON, ELEANOR THOMAS, MARDELL PERKINS, and CONSTANCE OLIVER, please write to Roy Sparks, 1710 West Market Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

NOTICE.—Members of the 112th Supply Train, Company B, Thirty-seventh Division, please write to Roy Sparks, 1710 West Market Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

GOMEZ, PHIL and ANNETTA.—Married in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1921. Please write to Elna and Eddie, care of this magazine.

BAIER, or GARRY, IRENE and RICHARD.—Your mother is worried. Please write to your sister, Mrs. W. Cole, 2618 James Avenue, North, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

O'BRIEN, BILLIE.—Kenneth and I are lonesome for you. Everything will be O. K. Please write to your pal, C.

CHENNELL, ROSIE.—Left London seventeen years ago. Last known address was Chicago, Illinois. Please write to your sister, Mrs. M. Taylor, 14B Peabody Square, Blackfriars' Road, London, S. E. 1, England.

DE LONG, KENNETH.—Formerly in the navy. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Is about twenty-six years of age. For important news, write to Dorothy M. Williams, 238 East Thirtieth Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

W. A. M.—Of 511 Agnes Street, Winnipeg. Are you ever going to write to the old folks again? Father.

AMSTER, LOUIS M.—About sixty-nine. Formerly of New York City. Believed to be in Arizona. Please write to Mrs. Ida L. Ruth, 960 East 144th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

DICKER, THAD.—About twenty-two years of age, medium height, light-brown hair. Last heard of in South Dakota. Please write to R. W. W., 805 Rose Avenue, Missoula, Montana.

DAWSON, ERNEST.—About thirty years of age, short, dark hair and eyes. Please write to your pal, Genie C. Address Mrs. R. W. Westvang, 805 Rose Avenue, Missoula, Montana.

LARSON, ROBERT.—Medium height, wore shell-rimmed glasses. Please write to Howard S. Mather, Route 3, Tarkio, Missouri.

BROWN, DELLA MAE.—Was in St. Joseph, Missouri, in June, 1908. Her daughter was adopted by a family named Wilkinson. She would like to find her own mother. Marjorie Mae Wilkinson, 1208½ South Tenth Street, St. Joseph, Missouri.

JOHNSON, HOWARD, JIM, BUSTER, and WAYNE.—Their parents, Effie and Andy Johnson, left Chesterton, Indiana, twenty years ago for New Mexico. The boys are between twenty and thirty years of age. Please write to your brother Jack's wife, Mrs. J. H. Johnson, care of Frenchot Oil Lease, Garber, Oklahoma.

NICHOLSON, JOHN M.—Last heard from in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Believed to be deceased Please advise Dora Crowell, P. O. Box 815, Butte, Montana.

STAPLETON, LYNN E.—Of Colfax, Washington. Was in Oroville, Washington, in 1919.

LA COSS, WILL.—I want him to help run the water-well drill again. Please write, anyway. Isaac Steinhoff, Box 113, Clements, Kansas.

WILSON.—Descendants of Robert and Mary, who left Michigan forty years ago, please write to relatives in Ontario. M. S., care of this magazine.

BIDDLE, HARLEY.—About thirty-two years of age. Light, wavy hair, blue eyes. Lived in the "Ghent" section of Norfolk. Please write to W., care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, CHARLES.—Was on the "Apache" between Jacksonville, Florida, and New York. Please write to Elvira, care of this magazine.

DAY, JAMES P.—A rodeo rider at Cheyenne, North Dakota. Write to your pal, Howard Tinsen, Devil's Lake, North Dakota.

HARRY.—I would like to hear from you. Dot, of Wisconsin.

MORROW, RICHARD E.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, in 1921. Please write to your cousin, P. J. Boyle, Fort Worth Power & Light Co., Fort Worth, Texas.

BAGLEY, ARSA M.—Formerly yard master in a Chicago railroad yard. Please write to Alice Buffinere, care of this magazine.

RULE, CLARA.—Lived in Florence, Colorado, about five years ago. Write to Dave, care of this magazine.

KING, RALPH WILLIAM.—Tall, slim, dark hair and eyes, both arms tattooed. Return to your babies and wife, who forgives you. Mrs. Ralph W. King, General Delivery, Sacramento, California.

MAXWELL, MUSSY A.—Last heard of in Fairfield, Iowa. Please write to your cousin, William J. Maxwell, R. F. D. 1, Box 87, Mingo Junction, Ohio.

NORTON, or MIZEE, A. P.—Please write to Sis and Buddy.

LITTEREST, MRS. IRENE and MR.—Last heard from in Youngstown, Ohio. Please write to Paul H. Baumann, 732 Thrush Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

HARBAUGH, KENNETH H.—Age seventeen, but looks older. Short; dark hair, eyes, and complexion; round shouldered; slightly bow-legged. Please write to O. A. Harbaugh, 706 Washington Street, Bicknell, Indiana.

HUTCHINGS, ALBERTIUS.—Was in Muncie, Indiana. Write to M. W. Stevens, Sergeant Squadron, Quantico, Virginia.

COLE, CHARLES.—Disappeared five years ago. Has glass eye and finger off from left hand. Write to your nephew, M. W. Stevens, Sergeant Squadron, Quantico, Virginia.

BRANDON, WILLIAM L. H.—Last heard of in Topeka, Kansas. Short, hazel eyes, eighteen years of age. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Belle Brandon, Oil Hill, Kansas.

RYAN, JOHN.—After the death of his wife, in 1905, his baby boy was left with some people in Olitic, Indiana. Please write to your son, Harold Ryan, Box 63, New Lisbon, Indiana.

COLLINS, C. H.—A barber by trade. Please write to Genevieve Lee, North Platte, Nebraska.

GERRARD, ELI.—A carpenter by trade. About seventy-one years old. Last heard of in 1895 at Germantown, Pennsylvania. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Banks, 13 Wigan Road, Atherton, West Manchester, England.

DRAPER, MRS. ROY.—Divorced and perhaps remarried. May save two deserted children from the poorhouse. Address J. C. Meltzer, Box 264, Walnut, Illinois.

SMITH, ESTHER (ANTHONY).—Have no fear of C. B. or his wife. Remember I am your true friend, and your Detroit friends are anxious to help you. Write, care of this magazine, to "Moms."

SMITH, HUGH.—Please write to your sister, Mrs. T. C. Lewis, Box 1229, Daytona Beach, Florida.

MARTIN, EDWIN J.—Short, twenty-eight years of age, brown hair, blue eyes. Last seen in Seattle, Washington. Please write to Joyce.

WADE, TOBIAS.—Black hair, blue eyes, short. Please write to James E. Wade, care of Mrs. W. M. McCormick, Mt. Comfort R. F. D., Fayetteville, Arkansas.

EVANS, G. C.—Dark complexion, medium weight. Last seen in July, 1916. Please write to Miss M. M. Kates, Box 106, Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

CONNALLY, ETHEL.—Last heard from in Winfield, Alabama. Please write to E. N. W., care of this magazine.

LARIOS, MARIE or MARCELLE.—Thought to be in Southern California. Is short, has straight, black, bobbed hair, brown eyes, foreign accent. Please write to J. N., P. O. Box 32, Oakland, California.

W. J. H.—Formerly of Akron, Ohio. Please call the Portage phone number or write. L.

PIERCE, JENNIE M.—Please write to your old friend, in care of this magazine. G. H. S.

CASTLEMAN, LOUISE.—Married name unknown. Believed to be living in Chicago. Formerly of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Please write to Friend, care of this magazine.

SQUIRES, FREDERICK.—Last heard of in Galveston, Texas, in 1912. Age forty-nine, tall, dark eyes, hair, and complexion. Address Divorced Wife, care of this magazine.

DADY.—Please write to me at 1342 West Third Street, Los Angeles, California. Mrs. P. H. H.

COFFMAN, GUY and HAZEL.—Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. Please write to Esther Colgate, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

JIMMIE.—I love you and my heart is breaking. Please write to me. Margie.

BABY BOY.—Left with a friend in 1923, when he was five months old. The friend died, and her daughter took the baby away and gave him to some people. He is now three years old, has dark eyes and hair, and may have a dark complexion, as he has some Indian blood in him. His own mother and father are able to care for him now, and would like to locate him. Address Mrs. C. C. Campbell, Box 625, Baxter Springs, Kansas.

MARTIN, CLAUD.—Was in Chicago, Illinois, a year ago. Please write to Stanley Cross, 1005 Clark Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

BILLETT, CARL.—Formerly of Nebish, Minnesota. Very important that I hear from you immediately. Your sister, Ida M. Saterlie, Box 161, Baudette, Minnesota.

PAST ACQUAINTANCES.—Please write to A. Gironard, V. S. V. Hospital 49, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

THOMPSON, BERT.—Painter by trade. Was in Fresno, California, in 1905. Please write to Romie Shear, 214 Mt. Ida Street, Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas.

FORNAL, KATHERINE.—Last heard of in Buffalo, New York. Please write to Peggy Collins, General Delivery, North Oil City, Pennsylvania.

SOLDIER FRIENDS of the Thirty-first Infantry, Company G, at Vladivostok, Siberia, and Manila, P. I., in 1919 and 1920, please write to J. H. Butler, 408 Harter Street, Winfield, Kansas.

McVEY, GUY R.—Please come home or write. Mrs. Minnie McVey, Route 4, Stroud, Oklahoma.

BLUNT, HIRAM M.—Your mother, baby, and I want to hear from you. Andre Ardelle Blunt, 2941 Maple Street, Everett, Washington.

WILSON, A. J.—Last heard of in Montana. Served in the 360nd Battalion, U. S. Infantry. Commonly known as Jim Wilson. Please notify J. L. MacFadyen, care of Hope Lumber Co., Glendale, Ontario, Canada.

HUSTON, CLEO, of Portland, Oregon, please write to your old pal, Donna Clutterbeck, General Delivery, Anacortes, Washington.

DE TAZIO, JOE.—Please send me a note once in a while, if you have not forgotten Mike, care of this magazine.

SHOENE, GEORGE PHILIP.—Last heard of in California in 1924. Is twenty-nine years old and has dark eyes and hair. Please write to C, care of this magazine.

STATLINGS, ROBERT, of Aberdeen, Idaho, and **ARTHUR MATHEWS**, of El Paso, Texas, please write to me at once. Mrs. Charles J. Brown, Box 141, Stuttgart, Arkansas.

STREETER, MR. and MRS.—Please write to your son, Robert Streeter, care of Steamship "Grand Haven," Grand Haven, Michigan.

BLAIR, MRS. ALICE.—Last heard of in Belfast, Maine. I feel the same toward you. Please write to your uncle, D. Annis, 1622 Hawthorne Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

TATE, ANDREW S.—Last heard of in Paragould, Arkansas, when he was starting for the oil fields. Important that you write to your brother Joe at once. W. J. Tate, 21152 Twelfth Street, Brightmoor, Detroit, Michigan.

CAMPBELL, SARAH.—About twenty-five years ago she lived with a family named Juday, near Milford, Indiana. Address Mrs. Victor C. Niles, Syracuse, Indiana.

MURPHY, FRANK.—Thirty-four years of age was in Kansas during the war. Please write to your friend, William McBride, 7902 Wade Park Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

WOOLLEY, AMBROSE JOHN or **GEORGE FRANKLIN.**—Left Ladyburn, Manchester, England, about thirty years ago for Winnipeg, Canada. Please write to your old friend, William Jones, 35 Hilden Street, Haulgh, Bolton, Lancashire, England.

N. Y. M.—Mother very ill. Her recovery depends upon hearing from you. Write to "Runt."

CHANDLER, SIMON B.—Of Columbus, Ohio. Your wife can give you news of advantage. Address, 19 Summer Street, Charleston, West Virginia.

WRIGHT, EVERETT LESLIE.—Was with the army Y. M. C. A. in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1918. Please write to I. L. Jones, 504 Neshannock Boulevard, New Castle, Pennsylvania.

THORKEL.—Please write home, as we are all so anxious. June.

HANKINS, MAY.—She and her brother were at an orphans' home at Plymouth, Indiana. Please communicate with William Hankins, care of W. T. O'Brien, R. R. 11, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

DUKE, WILLIAM ANDREW.—Last heard from eighteen years ago, when he left Savannah, Georgia, for Florida. He is about sixty-five years old. Please write to J. B. Duke, Box 43, Blackville, South Carolina.

GRINSELL, JOHN.—Born in Canada in 1849. Interested in the logging industry. Please write to your old friend, William F. Peyser, 135 Windsor Street, Hartford, Connecticut.

LeMAY, MRS. JOHN.—Formerly of Fairfield, Vermont, who put her four children, two boys and two girls, in St. Joseph's Home, Burlington, Vermont, in 1897, please write to J. R. E., care of this magazine.

BUDDY L.—I know of your trouble. If you need any assistance, please write to Teddy B., General Delivery, St. Louis, Missouri.

DECATUR, EVELYN ELECTA.—Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Please write at once to Mrs. C. A. Oliphant, care of Harry Thompson, R. R. 1, Burney, Indiana.

McLAUGHLIN, ANTHONY.—About forty-five years old, sandy hair, light complexion, medium height. Left Philadelphia in November, 1919. Please write to your sister, Annie McLaughlin, 137 Mercy Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

REILY, K. S. F.—Please send your address so I may answer your letter. C. C. Salinas.

HAGER, ELMER ROY.—Last heard of at Chesapeake Beach. Please write to your wife, Mrs. E. R. Hager, Egg Harbor, New Jersey.

AGNEW, HOPNER.—Last heard of in Canton, Ohio. Please write to Mrs. Louis Miller, Sea Rest Hotel, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

BRILL, LESLIE.—Please write to your old buddie, Gene Harrison, New St. Nicholas Hotel, Broadway and Market Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

LINDSEY, or LINSAY, ROBERT N., SR.—Last heard of in Louisville, Kentucky, five years ago. He is a mason by trade, medium height, brown eyes, and bald. Please address your son, William L. Lindsey, 221 Liberty Street, Schenectady, New York.

BROWN, ROBERT, and son, **KENNETH**, will benefit greatly by writing to Samuel Brown, 1361 North Wells Street, Chicago, Illinois.

BAXTER, HARRY and CLYDE V.—Harry is thirty-two years old, six feet tall, brown hair, blue eyes, and dark complexion. Last heard of in Columbus, Ohio, in 1923. Clyde is twenty-eight years old, six feet tall, light hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion, and is slightly lame. Last known address, Ionia, Michigan. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Charles A. Mellon, R. R. 12, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

ROSE, FLOYD S.—Will forgive and forget the past if you will write to your wife, Helen Rose.

COOP, JESSIE.—Last heard of at Eldorado, Kansas, two years ago. It is very important to communicate with Mrs. D. G., P. O. Box 1182, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

HUTTON, MARK.—About sixty-six years old. Last heard from in Sedan, Kansas, about forty years ago. Has brothers, Andy, Orlan, Arthur, and Jerry. An old friend would like to hear from him. O. L.

RIVENBARK, BERT.—About thirty-six years old. Born in Dublin County, North Carolina. Believed to be a civil engineer. Please write to your old mother, Mrs. Joy E. Rivenbark, Box 159, R. 3, Wilson, North Carolina.

THOMPSON, HARRY.—Last heard of working on the docks in New York, about thirteen years ago. Has light hair and blue eyes, age about thirty-nine. Please communicate with your sister, Annie Wright, 22 Delaware Street, Strand Road, Bootle, Liverpool, England.

JONES, JOHN L.—Eighteen years old, slender build, happy disposition, dark hair, blue eyes, scar on right eyelid. Please write to your mother, who is dying of grief. Mrs. B. A. Jones, 824 West Olney Road, Norfolk, Virginia.

RHODES, CHARLES PUTNAM.—Last heard of in Denver, Colorado, 1925. Is about thirty-five years old, brown hair, blue eyes, tall, and has scar on left thumb. Bryan has straightened everything. Please write to us. Anne.

GODFREY, MRS. ROSA, and her daughter, Bertha and Rashabeth.—Last heard of at Shawnee, Oklahoma, about twenty-nine years ago. Please write to Pete Godfrey, Box 395, Sperry, Oklahoma.